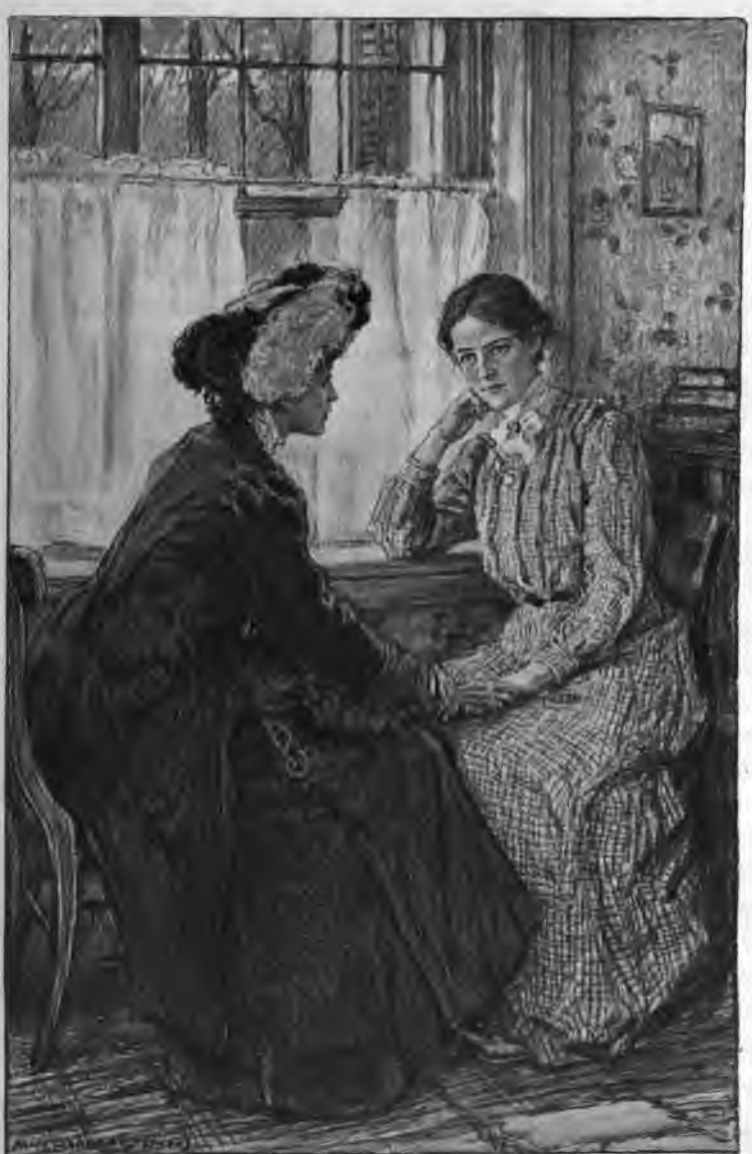
THE STORY OF THYRZA



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SHE FELT SUDDENLY QUITE HAPPY

THE STORY OF THYRZA

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THE SACRIFICE

I

It was a warm afternoon in the spring of the year. Thyrza Tennant, aged nine, walking beside the teacher and multiplying steps to keep up, was conscious of excitement in the wind, and, for those who were more fortunately placed than she had found herself, a sense of things to be. She was shaken in her feelings, too, because the tragically unexpected had come to pass. She who never "missed" had been wrecked on the present subjunctive of the verb "to have," and the teacher had told her that, if it were not so near Last Day and eleven pieces to be rehearsed, she would have had to stay after school and recite the entire conjugation. As it was, she might be excused, only she must be sure to prepare the lesson at home and be ready with it in the morning.

Thyrza was very little, and as her mother dressed her "bare neck and short sleeves," as the saying was, all the delicate bones of her brown throat were visible. She looked, Andy McAdam had said, in a brutal repetition of a phrase applied to her at his house, "like a picked chicken."

Andy had dismissed the qualification as soon as he had made it, and went joyously about his own particular boy affairs; but Thyrza never forgot. When she heard it, she ran into the darkened parlor where she could spend a long time unregarded before the glass, and stared at herself in a sickened questioning. Her dark eyes were very large and her face was thin. When she looked at it in the parlor glass it took on a livid pallor from the green slats of the inner blinds. It seemed to her unspeakably horrible to look like a picked chicken, and now, on her walk home from school, seeing the sturdy back of Andy as he trudged in front of her in a care-free intimacy with her sister Laura, banging Laura with his strap of books when it pleased him to do so, and accepting a kindred blow with a fraternal cheerfulness, the hot blood ran up to her face again, as she thought that if he were called upon to define fat and pleasant Laura's sister, he need only say, "Oh, she looks like a picked chicken!"

Rosie May Pelton had the teacher's hand on that homeward walk. She strutted a little, and occasionally peered round at Thyrza to note whether she minded renouncing a similar distinction on the other side, because, with that hand, teacher carried her parasol. But Thyrza had not expected such advancement, even if she had been able to give her present subjunctive parts with honor. She adored the teacher, and every day brought her nosegays with a stiff back of cedar; but she had no spirit for seizing upon power and place in homeward walks. That night the teacher

was absent-minded. She thought of a letter she had had, and of an approaching marriage-day, and Thyrza, waiting upon her moods, felt her remoteness and chilled under it. This being of her affections seemed often mysteriously removed to some peak where little girls could never climb. Rosie May, who also saw they were not to be talked to that night, and perhaps not even listened to, began a soft undertone to Thyrza.

"There 's goin' to be a concert over to the Corners."

"I know it," said Thyrza. She was venturing to avow an equal knowledge, though Rosie May, she was aware, expected her to take the news as news and show herself courteously attentive.

Rosie May had all the prettiness Thyrza lacked; her looks were a strange reversal of Thyrza's own, and she seemed to know it. Thyrza's black hair was straight and Rosie May's curled up into little rings that looked all alive like vine-tendrils in the wind. Her lips were full, and Thyrza's were thin, and she had no freckles on her nose. Once she had looked at Thyrza a long time, in a way she had, and then said with the meditative brutality of a woman grown to age but not to kindliness, —

"You and I look some alike, Thyrza, only we 're different."

And Thyrza hated her, not for being different but for knowing she was.

"It 's an Old Folks' Concert," said Rosie May.

"Yes, I know it," countered Thyrza. She was overstepping, she knew, and Rosie May would pay her out for it next day, but the desperate unhappiness of the afternoon had warped her patience.

"Aunt Hattie Ann 's goin' to sing," said Rosie May. "Any your folks goin' to sing?"

Thyrza longed to say that she had heard the doctor and the minister together lament over the voice and the ear of aunt Hattie Ann, and wonder how they could get her out of the seats. She had been lying in a bed of roadside brake and playing dead, and they had paused there, in the heat of their discussion, for a view of the mountain, and the minister himself, though he had laughed after he said it, had told the doctor that Hattie Ann Pelton was to his mind no better than a bull of Bashan. Thyrza had never repeated that saying, even to Laura, but she remembered it sometimes when she was afraid at night, and put it away with the picked chicken as too terrible to think about even by daylight. What would Rosie May say now, if she should return in a loud, bold voice so that the teacher herself might hear, "The minister says your aunt Hattie Ann sings like a bull of Bashan"? But she did not venture, though she thought so hard of the glorious possibility that she failed to answer, and Rosie May put another question.

"Any your folks goin' to the concert?"

The tone of her voice was her hateful one. Thyrza knew it quite well, what it recalled and what it portended. At that moment she loathed it so much that

she answered back in a voice loud enough for even Andy and Laura to hear, —

"Yes, we 're all going."

Rosie May was shocked out of her wonted calm.

"No, you 're not either," she declared involuntarily.

"Yes, we are too," said Thyrza. Every trace of color had left her face. She set her lips tightly together and her throat was dry. "I'm going, and mother's going, and Laura's going."

"Goin' where?" Laura called back over her shoulder; but Andy smote her so skillfully with his arithmetic, for no reason, that with every argument on her side, she fell upon him and required no answer.

"The tickets are fifty cents," Rosie May insinuated doubtingly.

This Thyrza scorned to notice. And circumstances seemed to intend her rescue. A light wagon whirled by and the youth in it took off his hat with a courteous bend.

"Ain't he just elegant!" breathed Rosie May, almost unctuously.

"Who is he?" asked the teacher, coming out of her dream.

Rosie May answered with a prim correctness, as if she were in class.

"Barton Gorse. His grandfather's died and he's spendin' the summer in the big house. All alone he is, too."

Now they were turning the corner by the great

elder-bush, and when the vista of the coming road lay before them Rosie May tittered.

"Why, Thyrza," said she, "there's your aunt."

The teacher wakened to a kindly attention. This was her first term, and she was scrupulous in the courtesy due to relatives.

"Thyrza's aunt?" she said. "Why, let me speak to her."

"There she is ahead," said Rosie May piously. "That's Thyrza's aunt."

"Why, no," said the teacher, with an innocent candor. "No, that's some little girl."

"No'm," repeated Rosie May, "it's Thyrza's aunt. Thyrza, ain't that your aunt?"

Thyrza could not answer. She looked straight before her, not definitely at the figure hurrying down the road, though it was included in her field of sight. She knew quite well what she should see, a little woman not much larger than a child because she was grotesquely bent, and wearing a child's hat with long blue streamers behind. It was a hat of an old fashion, rescued from the attic and loved by aunt Ellie with a sudden ardor not to be accounted for. More than once Mrs. Tennant had hidden it, and given her a respectable sunbonnet instead; but Aunt Ellie had wept silently and made herself sick with grief until they gave it back again.

"Well, there!" Mrs. Tennant had said then to the children, "I don't know's it does anybody any hurt. She might as well wear it, far's I know."

And the hat again in her grasp, aunt Ellie had settled down delightedly to her childish occupations. Now, as Thyrza walked along, her sick fancy outran her feet, and she seemed to see exactly how it would be when they overtook aunt Ellie. The teacher would put out her pretty hand and say, "Is this Thyrza's aunt?" It would be impossible to think what aunt Ellie would do then. She might break into a low giggle and hide her face in her apron. She might gravely show her empty pail, and say, in her childish voice, "Want to buy any plums?"

But Rosie May was speaking.

"Ain't that a little pail she's got?" She was asking it still out of that specious innocence.

Thyrza's heart rose again in her throat, beating out a hotter hatred. Rosie May knew quite well that aunt Ellie carried the little pail summer and winter, whether she went into the woods for berries, or poked off down the road when trees were bare and came home wondering because her pail was empty. They were very near her now, and to Thyrza the world was a black blur; though she heard Rosie May speaking again, she had no strength to hate her.

"Yes," her enemy was saying, "it must be Thyrza's aunt. I can see her little curls."

At that Thyrza remembered, with a new misery, how she had prayed to God, over and over again, that He would move aunt Ellie to do up her hair. The ring of stiff grayish curls went round her head, one row of them. They were tied back from her face by

a velvet snood, the little pinched face with the vague appealing eyes. The foremost children were almost on her now, and Thyrza was sure the teacher had begun to stretch out her hand. But God had not forgotten her. Aunt Ellie turned. She gave one look at them, and then, after an instant's halt, like a creature too frightened to act, made a little dash at the stone-wall, fled over it like running water and sped along the field toward home.

"Why!" said the teacher. "Why!" Then she cast a sudden glance at Thyrza, stumbling along now, her head bent low, and said at once, "Never mind about the conjugation to-night, Thyrza. You 'll have time enough to-morrow."

"Yes 'm," said Thyrza. "Good-night."

She too turned aside and climbed the stone-wall to follow wanly home after aunt Ellie. She did not understand why, but it seemed to her that if Rosie May was laughing inside, and the teacher might laugh out in a minute, when Rosie May had said more things, it was best to follow aunt Ellie. Perhaps they would n't laugh so hard then. She was angry with aunt Ellie, her curls and her little pail, but somehow, too, she was sorry for her, sorry, sorry. She came out of the field and into the lane just as aunt Ellie was going in at the back door of the dark house under the elm. The garden lay in front of the house, and in that Laura and Thyrza had each a bed. The rest was all a sweet tangle, and had been since their father died. He had loved flowers with a devotion the neighbors

smiled at; but since his death his wife had been too busy, tailoring, to nurture what he had sown.

Thyrza ran to her little bed now, and stooped over it before going into the house. It gave her a mute comfort. It was something of her own, and Rosie May had never seen it. Thyrza spent hours over the flowery bed, sometimes mourning its misfortunes and then trying to amend them with all her scanty wisdom; and because she was untiring, the plants responded to her. Now the pain in her heart went down a little, and she bent and plucked out a lush weed. She glanced all about to see that nobody was near, and said under her breath, "Darlings!" Thyrza felt her cheek hot then. She never heard that word used, but she had seen it in books, and it was beautiful to her. She looked over at Laura's bed. That was all zinnias and nasturtiums, already, though the spring was young, growing up to weeds. In a month, she knew, it would be choked and riotous, and Laura would be saying, in a careless imitation of their mother's phrasing, that it had got ahead of her after all and might as well go now. Then Thyrza came back to her own treasured plot: five or six perennials rescued from the wilderness down by the fence, some careful lines of coreopsis and mignonette just out of the ground. "Darlings!" she said again.

"That you, Thyrza?" came her mother's voice from the side window where she sat sewing. "Where's Laura?"

Thyrza went up the path, and in through the

kitchen. Aunt Ellie sat there, singing something about "Mary across the wild moor," a tune she remembered from her youth, though she had no words now to fit to it but Mary's name over and over, and "across the wild moor." Thyrza, hearing her, always thought that was Mary's name, and the changeless repetition of it was like the call of ghosts for a lost companion. Now she could not look at aunt Ellie. She was afraid of hating her as she did Rosie May.

Mrs. Tennant was a little woman with black eyes and a look of tense anxiety and over-keen apprehension, which were all for the possibility of not being able to buy the next barrel of flour. She sat with a table at her right, where she could put her hand on all sorts of knowing and necessary things, now a button, now a piece of canvas, and again a spool of thread. She was working, as she always seemed to be doing, on a pair of thick stubby trousers, and Thyrza knew they were later to encase the legs of Andy McAdam. All the boys in the township had their clothes made at Mrs. Tennant's. Thyrza, with a sort of fascinated proprietary interest, used to watch the trousers her mother had wrought walking into school or church, and from day to day keep track of their fortunes. Sometimes she would announce indifferently that Tommy Fiske would need a new jacket soon. "How'd you know?" her mother would inquire sharply, thrift gleaming in her eye. "He got his sleeve burnt on the stove," Thyrza would say. Or,

"Andy tore his collar. I don't believe they can mend it. He'll have to have a velvet one."

"Where's Laura?" repeated Mrs. Tennant, looking up from her work.

"She's coming. She came round the road."

"Did n't you come by the road?"

"No," said Thyrza. "I crossed the lot."

"What made you do that?"

"I don't know." She was sure that was quite true. It would have been impossible to tell what strand of power, twisted of sorrow for aunt Ellie and of hideous shame, had dragged her out of the accustomed way and home across the field. She sat down on the foot of the cloth-covered sofa where Trot, the maltee, was curled into a cushion from which she had just stretched one paw, the claws luxuriously curved. Thyrza watched her mother's hand guiding the short thread and snapping sharply back and forth. She spoke suddenly, irresistibly constrained.

"Mother, should n't you like to go to the Old Folks' Concert?"

Mrs. Tennant paused an instant to run her needle cruelly through an emery bag. At the same moment, she glanced up over her spectacles at Thyrza.

"Mercy, no!" she said. "What's got that into your head?"

Thyrza put out a hand to the cat, who immediately turned on her side in purring welcome.

"I don't know," she said. "Somebody was talking about it."

"I've got other things to do besides go to Old Folks' Concerts," said Mrs. Tennant. She held up the little square thick trousers before her and frowned at them. Then, in an onslaught of haste, she began to sew again.

Laura came in at the back door and stood looking placidly about, her dinner-pail in hand. She was a pretty, solid little girl, with brown eyes unvisited by Thyrza's sparks and tremors, and a neat foot and hand. There was something complete about Laura. It was a physical perfection and fullness that, without beauty, made her extremely pleasing to the eye and mind. Thyrza looked at her sharply. She was thinking how she had missed on the present subjunctive, and of her own certainty that, tragic as it was, Laura had quite forgotten it. Laura had these strange ideas of values. Then Thyrza turned to her mother and offered explosively, —

"I missed."

"You hand me that bastin' thread," said Mrs. Tennant absorbedly, pointing out a spool that seemed to have strayed to the edge of the table to escape depletion. But she remembered that an intellectual exigency had been presented to her, and answered with the requisite feeling, "You must both be good girls at school. I don't know how long you'll be able to go."

This was a bogie held up to affright them from of old. To Thyrza, who cherished dreams of advanced courses in some remote academic spot, it was a fore-

taste of agony; to Laura it meant nothing in particular. Of course, Laura thought, no one knew how long they would be able to go. People stopped going to school at all sorts of ages. Andy McAdam said he meant to stop next year, and get a job on the railroad. But at this moment even Thyrza had no outcry for that familiar spectre. Her mind was on the concert. It was not only that she knew her mother ought to go; she felt committed now to sending her. The lie to Rosie May had done it. Thyrza had these dreadful moments of longing to give people what they never desired for themselves. She would sit in church coveting for her mother an œileted collar, with such intensity that it was amazing that the wearer had not writhed in her seat. It had seemed for days now that this brilliant and beautiful occasion of the concert must not slip by unless her mother had a part in it.

"Mother," she said, "don't you s'pose you could go to the concert?"

"Mercy sakes, Thyrza," returned her mother, "what 's set you out on that concert? I should think you was Hattie Ann, for all the world. They say she ain't left off runnin' up an' down her scales half a day sence 't was thought of."

Thyrza persisted.

"Don't you s'pose you could walk so far?"

"You run out in the shed, one o' you, an' pick me up an apronful o' chips," said Mrs. Tennant. "I 'll blaze a fire an' we 'll have supper early an' get it out o' the way."

Thyrza sped first, to get there before Laura. She had times of leading what she called a consecrated life, and the consecration consisted in hurrying to do the tasks that others might effect. Just now she thought of her consecration with a pang. It had been absent from her the entire day.

II

That night Laura and Thyrza sat on the front doorstep, eating the crackers and milk they always had at bedtime. Thyrza was happy. She had fitted together a scheme so wonderful that it made all the rough places of the day quite plain. Her mother had gone over to gossip with grandma McAdam, and Thyrza knew this was the one chance to prepare Laura for what was on the way. Aunt Ellie came flitting round the side of the house, and seated herself on a step below them. She was uneasy in the dark without companionship, though now she had it she took no notice of the children, but sat crooning her little song to herself. Thyrza's splendid secret gave her a sense of daring and power. She ventured into a forbidden road.

"Aunt Ellie," she said, "I want you to do something."

Aunt Ellie stopped singing, and put her head sharply round, though she did not speak. Laura was listening, too. She was surprised, and almost, in her calm fashion, awed. It was an accepted rule of the house that aunt Ellie, who was afflicted, should be

allowed, in all practical ways, to take a path of her own.

"I want you," said Thyrza, in a voice that trembled at itself, "not to have any curls."

Aunt Ellie's hand went up to the row of ringlets round her head. Thyrza knew, with an intuition like a pang, just what look of startled inquiry was on her face. Yet she felt she had done right. In that new mood, warmed by her sense of power, she was sure the strength had been given her to a take a stand.

"Why!" said Laura. She seemed to be breathing all sorts of emotions out into the darkness. "Why, Thyrza Tennant!"

"That's it, aunt Ellie," pursued Thyrza. "Not any curls. Mother hasn't any curls. See how nice she looks."

"Not any curls!" repeated aunt Ellie. She had a way of echoing phrases in a wondering tone. "Not any curls."

"No," said Thyrza, with finality, "not any curls." Her mind was crowded by her other scheme. She could hardly wait to tell Laura what it was. She leaned toward her in the dark. "Laura," she said, "I'm going to make mother go to the concert."

"What for?" asked Laura, with a hideous directness. Laura understood that mother did not care to go, but she might have used all the arguments her certainty could have brought to bear before Thyrza would, in this hottest of moods, have heard her. And when the arguments were concluded, some ecstatic

vision of the concert would have flamed before Thyrza and she would have known anew that their mother ought to go.

"I've got it all planned," said Thyrza rapidly. "It's too far for her to walk."

"Why, mother walks a lot!"

"She's too used up after her tailoring—"

"Why, it's nothin' to clip it over to the Corners!"

"I'm going to get McAdam's dingle-cart and she can climb into it, and you and I can haul her."

Laura used a phrase that had often been accorded Thyrza in her soaring moods.

"Why, Thyrza, I should think you was crazy! I guess you never'd hear the last of it."

"I should n't tell anybody."

"Well, would n't they see us? Everybody's goin' to the Corners that night, an' I guess they'd pass us, would n't they? folks in their horse and wagon, an' you an' me haulin' a dingle-cart!"

"I should start as soon as 't was dusk, and when we got to the pinewood grove, I'd haul the dingle-cart in there, and let it stand round till we wanted to go home."

Laura had a gleam of grim humor.

"I guess 't would n't run away," she offered.

"And I shan't tell mother beforehand," said Thyrza. She saw a form through the dusk and heard the fall of hurried feet. This was their mother coming home. "If we told her, she'd say she would n't let us. So I'm just going to have the dingle-cart ready at the

gate, and you 've got to carry her bonnet to her and say, 'Now, mother, come along. Thyrza 's ready and there's the cart.' She 'll do it for you."

"Maybe the tickets 'll be gone," ventured Laura feebly.

"No, they won't. I 'm going to walk over to-morrow after school and get two."

"We can't go in on two."

"Yes, we can." Her sense of consecration came upon her, and she added with an exalted fervor, "You and mother 'll go in. I shall wait for you outside. I don't care much about singing."

"Why, Thyrza Tennant! yes, you do. You 'most cry sometimes when they sing 'When I 'm about to die.' An' anyways," she planted her foot triumphantly on fact, "where you goin' to get the money?"

Thyrza turned upon her in the dusk. Her voice trembled from a solemn recognition of what she had to say.

"I 'm going to take it out of my missionary box."

"Why, Thyrza Tennant! I never heard such a thing in my life. But you 've only got sixty cents."

Thyrza answered sweetly in the tone of the Christian martyr, assured of after-recompense, —

"I 'm going to take forty out of yours."

"Thyrza Tennant, that's stealin'!"

"No, it isn't," said Thyrza firmly. "I 've told you beforehand, so now it isn't. Hush! there 's mother."

The next events followed as Thyrza had decreed. After school she slipped away while Andy McAdam

was putting gravel in Laura's waterproof-hood, and Rosie May stood by, in a gentle interest, enjoying Laura's emotions, and started on a race for the Corners. She ran until the blood beat in her ears and her throat was dry, all in a passion, partly of joy over the greatness of her enterprise, and partly of fear. Thyrza was afraid of nearly everything not within her familiar bounds of life. Her mind held dim corners of apprehension. One favorite fear that beset her on lonely roads, and that she accepted as part of her unchanging lot, was that some day, out of the stillness and the dusk, an elephant would chase her. The world beyond the neighborhood was all an ecstasy of newness and its terrors. Now she was afraid of the pinewood grove as she ran through, and afraid of good old Mr. Merrill driving in his long-reach and never even guessing there might be a little girl in the track to be bowed to. Thyrza sat behind him in church, and knew every line in the map of his wrinkled red neck; but now, meeting him out of her accustomed paths, she cast one awed glance at him and fled by on hurried feet.

When she got home that night, the two tickets were tucked into her apron pocket, and her handkerchief was on top of them, and her little fist over that. Laura gave her one hurried glance. Laura could scarcely believe in such dash and abandon. As for Thyrza, she felt the fearful joy of youth tasting for the first time an unchartered liberty. She nodded triumphantly at Laura. Supper was over, and hers had been saved for her on the end of the kitchen table.

Still keeping her hand in her apron pocket, she ran to the table and took a large bite of johnny-cake made with molasses, as she liked it. Her mother was washing dishes at the sink; but now she turned in a deferred anxiety.

"For mercy sake, Thyrza," she inquired, "where you been?"

Thyrza choked upon her johnny-cake. Lying was afar from her. She could not answer.

"You got your feet wet?" pursued Mrs. Tennant anxiously. "You ain't been into the swamp anywheres after flag, have you?"

Thyrza's mind cleared now that it was apparent she had to account only for damage done herself.

"No, mother, I ain't, truly I ain't," she averred, lapsing, in the extremity of her candor, into an abhorred verb. "I'm just as dry — see if I ain't."

But Mrs. Tennant had some buttonholes to finish that night, and the pressing to do, and so long as her two hostages were before her unimpaired, she had no mind to spend on past occurrences.

Thyrza ate a greedy supper, exhilarated as she was by her run in the moist, cool air, and the reaction from her passing fear. It was beautiful to have had the fears, since nothing had happened after all. When she went into the pantry to carry away the bread, Laura, waiting for the chance, fled after her.

"Let me see 'em," she besought, in an awed whisper.

Thyrza brought out the two wonderful green slips

from her apron pocket and, incredulous herself of their existence, flashed them, in one brief gesture, before her sister's eyes. Laura caught her breath.

"Thyrza Tennant," she said, "if you ain't the greatest!"

This was two days before the concert, and the sisters went about in that fevered interval almost choked with the sense of their undertaking. The day itself came with a lowering sky, and the night was dark. When they rose from the supper-table, Thyrza could scarcely speak. Her eyes glittered and her cheeks were a vivid red. Once her mother paused in her goings to and fro between pantry and table to lay a hand on her forehead and ask, —

"You ain't feverish, be you?"

Thyrza escaped the kindly touch, and clutched at the tickets, now in the bottom of her dress pocket. She had been very careful, but they were crumpled from much handling.

"Are we goin' to wear our best?" Laura asked her, in a whisper, when Mrs. Tennant had disappeared again, to carry away the bread.

"We can't," Thyrza choked. "She'd notice. It don't make any difference, that don't."

It seemed to her that the grandeur of their mission had lifted them even above considerations of cashmere frocks trimmed with velvet ribbon. Thyrza felt that, in some way, in spite of the happiness she foresaw in giving her mother pleasure, she was now on the road to sacrifice.

"I guess I'll go over to Mis' McAdam's a spell an' set with gran'ma," came their mother's voice. "Folks'll be goin' to the concert, an' she's kinder nervous when the neighborhood's away."

Thyrza made a mad rush from the kitchen and fell upon her mother's aproned skirt.

"Don't you do it," she besought. "Don't you do it. You'll spoil it all."

Mrs. Tennant looked down at her in wonder.

"You're all beat out," said she. "No, mother won't go if you don't feel well. You run right up, Thyrza, an' slip yourself into bed."

Thyrza, with a little sigh, seemed setting out to obey. But in the entry she put on her school hat and slipped the elastic under her chin. Laura had followed her.

"In just a quarter of an hour," said Thyrza, in her choking voice, "you tell her. You get her bonnet for her, and the dingle-cart'll be at the gate."

"You tell her yourself," said Laura, overcome with the responsibilities of her position. "Tell her now."

"No," said Thyrza sadly, her wretched past rising like a nemesis before her. "She never'd believe me. She'd say 't was some of my folderol." She tugged the front door softly open and stepped out. "Shut it to easy," she whispered. "She'll think I've gone to bed."

It was a very plain and pleasant way by daylight to the McAdams' shed, the walls bulging out from

age and the imminence of falling; but in this misty dusk all the long-familiar objects by the way took on uncouth shapes like the ghosts of normal life. When she crossed the orchard, even the gnarly apple trees seemed to stretch out unfriendly arms to her, and she stumbled in her fright over the wall where Andy had put the flat stone that was so commodious by day. The entrance to the shed was a way of terror. The sleigh where she had played by the hour not a week before seemed the dark cage of unruly spirits, and the old chaise Parson McAdam had driven long ago, and that would take the road no more, was a monster of evil shape. There was the little cart on the outskirts of these horrors. She knew where to put her hands on it; but when she had drawn it out, she felt at once that this was the utmost she could do. The blood was in her face and a sob rose in her throat. When some one spoke at her side, she screamed piercingly.

"Aw," said Andy, "what ye doin' of? Give me hold o' that, won't ye?"

And immediately she was walking away with Andy, each of them tugging at a shaft.

"'T ain't goin' to rain," said Andy presently, on a smoother level. "You need n't pick it up."

"Pick what up?"

"That brush you 've got piled up in the pines. Wa'n't that what you took the cart for?"

Thyrza stopped and threw her weight on the shafts.

"Aw, come," said Andy, "don't go to draggin' back that way. I can't haul you 'n' the cart, too."

"Andy," said Thyrza, "promise me you 'll leave me alone the minute you get the cart to our gate."

"I was goin' along to the pines an' help pick up," said Andy, aggrieved. "'F you don't want me to, I need n't."

"Andy, I'm going to have me a bunch o' snap-crackers Fourth o' July. If you 'll leave me at the gate and run home and never look back I 'll give 'em to you. I 'll give you every one."

"'F I want snap-crackers, I guess I can git 'em 'thout comin' to a girl," said Andy manfully. "You can haul your brush yourself, 'f you want to. 'S nothin' to me." He vanished into the darkness and left her trembling in an unfriendly world.

She put all her strength into the work and tugged first on one shaft and then on the other, and so, in its zigzag way, the car of sacrifice rolled on. Another little figure sped forward to her out of the dark.

"O Thyrza," cried Laura, in the tone of high excitement, "she says it 's all foolishness. She won't believe you 're here, nor about the cart nor the concert nor anything."

"Did you get her bonnet for her?" asked Thyrza, in an agony.

"I laid it out on the entry table an' I told her 't was there. But all she 'd do was to hang up the dish-cloth and say, 'I believe I 'll run over to gran'ma McAdam's a minute, after all.'"

There came a sound of wheels and a beating of

hoofs. A buggy rolled by, some one craning a neck to discern the children in the darkness.

"She's got to come!" cried Thyrza. "She's got to come now. We'll be late as it is. Laura! there she is coming."

The slight figure in the familiar shawl and bonnet was speeding down the path. All in a hurried moment Thyrza's trouble turned to joy.

"O mother, get in!" she cried. "Oh, ain't it splendid! I'm so glad."

While she spoke the ascent was made, and she, who had tested the weight of the chariot, knew there was no time to lose.

"Ketch hold, Laura," she cried. "You take one shaft. I'll take t' other."

Laura plunged to her post, and down the little incline beyond the house they went whirling. Then came a rise of ground, the wheels were stayed and they threw themselves forward and tugged and strained. What sound was it that rose behind them? A low and happy crooning of a desolate air: "Mary across the wild moor." Laura felt only a stolid and rather unpleasant surprise. To Thyrza the world turned cruel. She heard herself crying aloud, "'T is n't mother! 'T is n't mother! It's aunt Ellie." There they stood, the ruins of their little dream about them, and aunt Ellie sat in the cart and sang. Laura recovered healthily, almost at once.

"We ain't gone far," she said. "Let's go back an' get mother now. 'T ain't too late."

"It is too late," cried Thyrza. Her voice sounded like the wailing of the lost. "It's too late!"

"No, 't ain't either," persisted Laura.

Thyrza clutched her in the dark.

"Laura," she said, "God meant it."

"You mustn't swear," said Laura. The darkness was beginning to tell on her.

Thyrza had soared from the abyss to another height of sacrifice.

"God didn't mean mother should have it," she announced. "He meant aunt Ellie should. But she's got to walk. We couldn't any more pull this to the Corners—"

"No, course we couldn't," said Laura. Her hard little hands felt strained and torn. She rubbed them ruefully.

"You get out, aunt Ellie," Thyrza called, in the blithe tone of one who has learned a higher will. "We aren't going to ride, aunt Ellie. We're going to walk."

Aunt Ellie stepped lightly down, and slipped her hand into Thyrza's, and the three went on. Thyrza was absorbed in her certainty that this was sacrifice; but presently she heard a little sulky whisper at her side.

"Thyrza! Thyrza! You goin' to let her go?"

"Yes," said Thyrza.

Aunt Ellie, flying along with her odd little trot, heard nothing. She was crooning "Mary across the wild moor."

"Thyrza," came the whisper again. It seemed now to be not Laura but the devil. "She'll look awful funny."

Thyrza saw at once that Laura's life was not to be enriched by the adventure. This was her quest and hers alone.

"You need n't go in," she said gloriously. "I 'm going myself."

The little figure melted away. Thyrza heard its pattering steps lighter and lighter on the homeward track. Laura had deserted her, and she and aunt Ellie were going on and on, hand in hand, along a path that would never end. Wagons passed them. Once somebody called out, "Ride?" but she could not answer. She only held aunt Ellie's little hand the tighter. Then it began to rain.

"Oh!" cried Thyrza sharply, "you 've got on mother's bonnet. Take it off, aunt Ellie. Take it off."

On the instant, aunt Ellie obeyed.

"Give it to me," said Thyrza. "I 'll put my skirt over it." So they continued, and the rain fell on them. Once Thyrza realized that a bonnet string had got under her feet, and that she was treading on it, but she kept saying to herself, agonized and yet exalted, "It's the best I can do. It's the best I can do."

And then they came into the square in front of the hall, and there were lanterns and groups of shawled and dripping people, and Thyrza knew this was the mount of sacrifice. Still holding aunt Ellie's hand,

she passed into the vestibule of the hall, and there unloosed the clinging grasp, to find the tickets in her pocket. But in that instant she saw other people staring — familiar faces now, though in this crisis they seemed to be the masks of enemies — and turned herself to look. There stood aunt Ellie, a picture of vague delight. The rain had washed her face into a moist rosiness, and her hair no longer kept its ring of curls. It was cut in uneven jags close to her poll. The rain had sleeked it into little threads, and tiny lines of it fringed her forehead. Thyrza forgot that the neighbors were looking on, and that the gentry of the Corners was also there to see.

"Aunt Ellie," she breathed, "you 've cut off your hair."

Aunt Ellie, with a satisfied and knowing smile, put up a hand to her sleek crown.

"Not wear curls!" she murmured, as one demanding praise. "Not wear curls!"

Thyrza paused for one blind instant. Then she put out her hand and took that other waiting one, thrust her tickets vaguely at the door-keeper and went into the lighted hall. She knew that some one led them to seats near the front, that there was a semicircular crowd of people on the platform, with Hattie Ann among them, and that the bass-viol and fiddles were tuning with a call that sickened and excited her. There was a great deal of talking and rustling here and there, and by and by it was quiet and a chorus of voices began, —

"O my beloved!"

Thyrza had never felt anything like the joy and pain of it, the joy of riding on the waves of sound, and the sharp pang of human misery. And suddenly, as she was thinking how strange it was and how queer everybody looked and how large Hattie Ann's head was, and how it kept growing larger and larger, the hall began to darken. Then Barton Gorse, the young man who had come to spend the summer in his grandfather's house, left his seat across the way, and picked her up in his arms. Thyrza dropped her head on his shoulder with a sense that, although she could neither breathe nor see, things were going to be different now he had come; and so he carried her away.

II

THE RIVAL HOUSES

It was a habit among the children of Leafy Road to make play-houses in the highway along by the fence. They outlined their habitations with stones or sticks, and moved in beautiful furniture of the carved bark of trees. Sometimes there were chairs resembling convenient flat stones tumbled off the walls at great risk to little toes, or tugged thither by hot and panting house-holders. Under the two great maples that were all gold every autumn, and never by any chance varied by a red leaf, were three play-houses. The first, after leaving the schoolhouse on the road to the Corners, belonged to Thyrza, the second to Rosie May, and the third to Laura. Rosie May had chosen the second because it backed upon an upright stone that was nice to lean against; and though Thyrza had discovered the stone the moment it had been put there by Judge Gorse, who was very particular about the look of his fields and had found the boys were always toppling off the round stones from the wall at this one point, she had borne without question to see it taken away from her. Thyrza had still no way of telling how Rosie May made her feel. None of her thoughts were ever known to her little blond enemy, because Rosie May was the last living creature before whom she could be her simple self. Yet she always had a feeling

as if she were standing bare and shivering for Rosie May to stick pins in. Her feet seemed to be unshod for Rosie May to stamp on, her hair seemed to be flying over to Rosie May to be pulled; and yet the little blond girl never did more than look at her critically and make her feel how thin she was, how dark and ugly, and that her nose had freckles. Thyrza had a feeling that sometime there would come a day when Rosie May would say all she thought, and it would be terrible. She was afraid of rousing that hitherto mute something which should cause her adversary to do her worst. So her schooldays were bitter to her and playtime an anguish of apprehension.

She could remember one day in winter when several of the mothers went to pass the afternoon with Mrs. McAdam, taking their little girls with them. The mothers settled in the best room to their knitting and seaming, and the children were sent out into the kitchen, with the kindly injunction to play. Thyrza went with a sick heart, a remembered misery she tasted all her life, to think how sure Rosie May was to make her miserable or funny before the afternoon's ordeal was over. She remembered looking back as she left the room, a maiden led to sacrifice, and thinking with passionate envy of the happy fate allotted to all old ladies who may sit and sew and even be silent by the hour without incurring the ridicule of their kind. What did happen that afternoon she never remembered. Rosie May was not more hateful than usual, though the path that led beside hers had been more than

ordinarily thorny. At that time Thyrza had recognized what Rosie May was in her life. All these alarms and miseries were hidden from Laura, who had a general idea that Rosie May was inclined to be hateful, and that Thyrza liked to keep away from her; but if she had realized the warfare in her sister's breast, she would no doubt, with the utmost simplicity, have put out her stout little fist and smitten Rosie May full sore.

One warm sweet day in vacation, Thyrza suddenly felt like playing hard. She wanted to go very far and find new things, or to accept the old ones with a difference. The schoolhouse seemed a long distance away, as it always did in summer, and the thought of the deserted play-houses, their walls knocked about by wandering horses and marauding boys, appealed to her.

Laura, with the sense of the sleepy day working a different alchemy in her, was sitting on the pigpen fence with Andy. They had each a shingle, and each was scratching the back of a pig, to the great increase of porcine content. When Thyrza came round the corner, Andy was chanting his own prowess and the derelictions of gran'ther's gun, preserved by grandma, a terrifying heritage.

"Kick!" he was interjecting with scorn. "Why, last time Sammy Fiske an' me went out pa'tridge-shootin' —" Here he caught sight of Thyrza and paused, not from embarrassment, but for lack of matter and the realization that she gave convenient pretext for a halt. Thyrza threw herself at the fence,

and selecting a shingle from the supply kept ever at hand, began using it absently, yet with vigor, on an unfriended pig.

"Say," she began, including Andy within the sweep of her eye, "le 's go some'r's."

Thyrza had a correct vocabulary, devoted to the moments when she wished to lead an intellectual life or abase herself in moral sacrifice; but when she sought to beguile Laura and Andy into expeditions she felicitously used their language. Andy looked up at her briefly. He never seemed to see Thyrza, perhaps because she was the youngest and had given him and Laura many uncertain moments, in the course of their lives, by offer of her company.

"Nowher's to go," he replied as briefly.

Thyrza had caught the trail of the talk on her arrival.

"You could take your gran'ther's gun," she suggested, "and we could go over 'n the pines and shoot at a mark."

"Mark be jiggered!" said Andy, who could hardly own to poor feminine things that grandma kept the gun "up attic," after having caused a neighbor to make it impotent by divorcing stock and barrel. "I guess if you 'd once drawed bead on a moose or an elk you would n't talk about shootin' at no marks."

"There ain't any moose round here," said Laura quietly.

"Ain't there?" inquired Andy, with gloom. "Well, I 'd like to know why there ain't?"

Nobody could tell him, and Thyrza, who was ready to believe where she admired as she did Andy, immediately felt that there were no moose because of his personal valor. But she put the question by.

"Well," she ventured, "we could go some'r's anyways. We could go down to the play-houses."

"Huh!" said Andy. "I can see through that. Rosie May 's gone by to the Corners, an' you know she won't be there to make you stan' round."

Thyrza was too entirely delighted to repel the charge.

"Has she gone, Andy?" she cried. "Honest and true? O Laura, come on down!"

Laura obediently left the fence and dropped her shingle on the pile. She was placidly ready to play wherever she should be called. The pigs, after one expectant moment, gave a grunt and sauntered to a cooler slough. The spell of the morning was broken for them all, and even Andy lounged away from his perch, condescending to wait for them with an indifference which was lordly and, Thyrza felt, very becoming to him. She made haste to follow, and while Laura walked at her side kept urging in an undertone, "You ask him. You ask him."

Andy was whistling with a piercing bravery, and he seemed not to hear. All their confidences, he implied, were of the things girls were likely to say, which are of no importance whatever. But Laura had come up with him and was obediently reciting, "Come on down, Andy."

He reflected rapidly. It was vacation, and he knew where every boy was likely to be at this time of day. Nobody would see him playing with girls, and if he went home grandmother was sure to set him to bringing in wood.

"All right," said he graciously. "I'll go for half an hour or so."

They set off down the road together, but not until Thyrza had scurried into the house and returned with something knobby, veiled obscurely by a paper bag.

"What's that?" asked Laura, though without much interest.

"Oh, you'll see," said Thyrza, and they went on, Laura dismissing the mystery from her mind because it seemed natural that she could find out when the time came, and Andy, against reason, hoping it meant cake.

Two hours of the forenoon went very fast. Andy, in spite of himself, got interested in play-houses. The girls had been such fools as builders. They had put the stone arm-chair and sofa in the sun, where all their leaf-dressed dolls would wither. They had laid their foundations catacornered when they might as well have had them straight. Of all things Andy liked to take a stick for measurement and pretend it was a foot-rule, and he loved to carry a twig in his mouth in the certainty that it was really a nail and that he should presently drive it somewhere, straight and swift. It was his own particular game. The girls, he was sure, never suspected that private

pastime. They thought he was simply sauntering about, rebuking their foolishness; whereas he was really having a remarkably good time.

When the houses were decently in order, the girls breathed hard as they knew their mother would do, and said, "There!" Then Andy looked at the forlorn little plot that lay between their reconstructed habitations.

"Goin' to straighten that up?" he asked. It was the tone of the carpenter, but they did not know it. He had almost said, "jack it up," because that was what had been done to the old house his gran'ther bought once and prepared for summer boarders, only to lose thirty-seven dollars on it.

Thyrza blanched as at mention of a ghost.

"Oh, no!" said she. "That's Rosie May's."

"Rosie May ain't here," leered Andy. He looked like the carpenter wanting a job, or the carpenter on strike. Thyrza gazed at him in the earnest beseeching of one who hears sacrilege and hopes she may never be called upon to listen to it again.

"Andy McAdam," said she, "you mustn't any more touch anything in that play-house, you mustn't even set your foot inside of it." — She paused, all her apprehension before Rosie May and her sense of play-house honor ranged together against him.

Andy took one step toward the forbidden territory.

"Who's afraid of Rosie May?" he inquired.

But at that moment Laura, who had been looking

on and judging from her own sense of play-house rights, cut in with an instinctive feminine wile.

"Come over here, Andy. Come into my house. I got a sopsavine."

It was nearly noon and Andy was hungry. He knew something of Laura, her calm, slow justice and her way of doing exactly what she said. If he defied her now, she was capable of withholding largess. So he went slowly into her compound, with the air of finding it a tiresome thing to do, and looked, yet as if he were not looking, for the apple. There it was, divided into quarters, on the stone dining-table. Laura had borrowed his knife, after he had whittled out his two-foot rule, and quietly prepared her banquet for him. There was no thought of herself, or of Thyrza.

"You set down," said she, in a grave imitation of her mother's manner. "There! I ain't a mite hungry. I've had a kind of a headache all day."

So Andy sat down, knowing he should not receive the apple unless he took it in the way she bade, and Laura, walking back and forth from her stone cook-stove to the table, on imaginary errands, tasted of happiness. Andy was thinking of the apple, but she was thinking of him. Thyrza, alone in her play-house, looked over and saw them. At once she understood. She knew what Laura was playing, whether Laura knew it or not. Andy was Laura's husband, and they were having dinner after his work. At first Thyrza smiled, because it was pleasant to her to see Laura so cosy. She felt quite grown up herself, and as a

mother might whose children are content. But in a moment a wind seemed to come up in her and sweep her acquiescence away, leaving a bare house of life for evil desires to riot in. She was angry with Laura for painting that little picture of happiness, and furious with Andy for making part of it. She felt bereft, with a rage of loneliness that was new to her.

"Andy!" she called. "Andy!"

But Andy ate with wily fastidiousness, because that would please Laura best and ensure him the last morsel; he did not hear.

"Andy!" she called again.

Even Laura failed to hear. She was standing near the cook-stove, with a happy, absent look on her face, really thinking it was time to dish up the beet-greens. But to Thyrza the look seemed to be saying, "Andy is here in my house. It 's his house and mine."

The fruit was eaten now, and the recipient of tribute lolled into an easier attitude, having nothing more to gain. Not for him were symbolic beet-greens on an imaginary platter, and when Laura somewhat timidly offered them, knowing their value in his eyes, he only said, "Huh!" and thinking by implication of dinner, rose to saunter off. But Thyrza was calling him. The cover was off the mysterious parcel she had brought, and now she stood holding it in plain view, not looking at it herself, not even offering it to him, but like a guardian of a bribe whose value is incalculable.

"Andy," she was calling. "See what I got here."

Laura, too, saw it, and with the dismay of one who

beholds household gods reft from their place and on the way to desecration.

"Thyrza Tennant!" she cried. "You 've been an' got the stere'scope off the parlor table. Why, Thyrza Tennant!"

"I don't care 'f I have," responded Thyrza, now entirely reckless. She was exhilarated by her own dash and daring in having abstracted the stereoscope and its dozen pictures for this purpose, though the need had not visualized itself to her when she did it. She only remembered then that the McAdams had no stereoscope, and that this, in some moment of dearth, would serve as bait for Andy. "Andy, come on over."

Andy came. In a moment he was sitting, not on the sofa, as conventionality would have proposed, but on the dining-table, with his legs stretched out, regarding the picture of Niagara Falls. The balance of pleasure had shifted. Thyrza was happy now, and she did not think of Laura. She stood at his side radiantly, taking views after he had done with them and furnishing him with fresh ones. This modesty of handmaidenship was mostly imitative. She had seen Laura exercise it to the life, and swift feminine instincts had assembled to show her what she also might enjoy. Laura, in her own house, was meekly sitting down to mend a balm-of-Gilead-leaf apron.

A little way down the road a wagon had stopped. It was the Peltons', halting at Mrs. Daniel Simpson's gate to leave her molasses-jug which they had taken to town to be filled. Thence Rosie May had spied the

three figures alarmingly near her play-house and had at once speciously besought permission to go and play with Thyrza and Laura.

"Mercy sakes, child!" said her mother, a blond lady whose ankles seemed to be growing small as she enlarged, and who regarded life querulously from her inability to "get round," "what you want to go an' green up your best dress for? You set right still an' it'll be dinner-time 'fore you know it."

But Rosie May had climbed dextrously over the wheel, and was speeding down the road to her threatened homestead. Her mother gave one despairing glance after her, and her father said, "Well! well!" Then they turned into the cross-road and went slowly on to their own house, not far away.

The family in the play-house had been unaware of this, and so it was with entire surprise that they heard Rosie May's most plaguing tone breaking on the air.

"Playin' with the girls! Andy McAdam playin' with the girls!

> "'Andy, Andy, so they say,
> Goes a-courtin' night an' day,
> Sword an' pistol by his side.
> Thyrza Tennant shall be his bride.'"

Andy heard it, and grew deeply, miserably red. He saw with a prophetic vision how that chant would echo down his coming years. When school began, Rosie May would assemble the girls about her, and tell the story of finding Andy "playin' house" with Thyrza

Tennant. The girls would never forget, and at such times as he, in a wholesome assertion of his free manhood, was neither giving them lozenges nor hauling them uphill, they would raise the strident chorus of "Andy McAdam and the play-house." But he sat still and looked at views with a fine indifference. Thyrza stood beside him for one moment, all flaming wrath. She, too, foresaw the future. More, she saw Rosie May, and at last she was not afraid of her. As an avenging messenger, as one in a dream, she laid the views down on the grass and stepped over into Rosie May's house, and there she fell upon walls and furniture and wrecked them. Thyrza did her wrecking, not in heat, but slowly and with a terrible precision. She gathered up the sticks that were the wall, and laid them in a neat pile at her play-house door. Rosie May shrieked aloud.

"You're spoilin' my house! you're spoilin' my house! Laura, she's spoilin' my house."

Laura, white with earnestness and horror over this breaking of the play-house law, left her own domain and took a little run to Thyrza's side.

"You mustn't," she kept saying, as if she recalled her sister to a better self. "Why, Thyrza, only see what you're doin'!"

Thyrza, white and calm, kept on doing. She collected the stones that were the tables and chairs, and with great difficulty replaced them on the top of the wall. They did not seem to her heavy. The call of a great task subdued all lesser pains. One small, square

stone, much prized by Rosie May as a footstool, she cast deftly over the wall into the field, and only felt a little surprise that, being square, it should roll and bounce so far.

Andy, up to this moment, had stood in awestricken silence. Now it became evident to him that this was woman's war, and he affected to catch sight of a squirrel on the walnut over the way, ran briskly out into the road to shy a stone at him, watched the tree absorbedly a moment, and then sauntered off, hands in his pockets, whistling cheerily. Andy was moved by a fearful pleasure, and he made up his mind to slip behind the old elder-bush further on and see them fight it out. Only it did seem hard luck to have the quarrel about him.

Rosie May was crying hysterically. She devoted herself to the statement of obvious facts.

"You 've spoiled my house," she sobbed, over and over. "You 've took an' pulled it to pieces an' piled it up in a pile."

Devilish intelligence animated Thyrza. She knew just what to answer, to leave Rosie May not one stone upon another. Seeking in the treasury of her imagination, she found the dart to slay her enemy's domestic peace. She placed herself in front of Rosie May and spoke with an awful clearness while Laura, in the background, heard and trembled.

"You have n't any house," said Thyrza, drawing upon her clearest wells of English, the more to quell her adversary, for Rosie May said "ain't" all day

long. "Don't you know what those sticks are? They are my pile of wood now. People tear down old houses and burn 'em up. I 've torn down your house, and I 'm going to burn it in my kitchen stove. You thought it was your furniture I put up on the wall. It was n't. It was stones, just stones. You have n't any furniture. You only had stones, and now they 're gone, same as your house."

Rosie May looked at her with wet eyes widened by horror. She had accepted play-houses with dolls and mullein gowns as something in the nature of things. Now Thyrza had made them not to be. Neither of the sisters had ever seen her cry, and Laura felt a wave of pity for the grief so strangely emphasized by the child's best clothes, her leghorn hat with its pink buds and the wide blue streamers "down behind." Thyrza had no pity. She moved a step nearer her fallen adversary and looked her in the eye. Probably Thyrza was never in her life to know a keener sensation of sheer temperamental triumph than at the instant when she looked Rosie May in the eye and knew she had conquered her.

"I 'll tell you something else," she said, relapsing slightly into her daily speech. "If you was to dare me, I 'd snatch off your hat and stamp on it, and I 'd tear the Hamburg off your petticoat."

Rosie May shrieked and fled, and Thyrza, while the distracted pink dot raced down the road, and Andy crashed into the bushes and over the wall lest Rosie May should know he had been listening, turned to

comfort her sister. Laura looked as if one universal tragedy had overwhelmed them.

"O Thyrza!" she breathed. "Thyrza Tennant!"

Thyrza had by no means yet fallen from the height of her exaltation.

"Must be 'most dinner-time," she said, from a lofty calm. "Here, you take the instrument and I 'll take the views."

Laura accepted her apportionment meekly and trudged home with heavy steps. She wondered what Mrs. Pelton would say, and whether Rosie May would ever give Thyrza another easy moment. But Thyrza, her head in the air, stepped on like a queen.

The day passed and nothing happened. Thyrza looked at least for a thunder-shower, which she had grown to consider an expression of feeling on the part of a capricious God. That was a working theory in Leafy Road. When the clouds darkened in the west feminine conversation took on a conciliatory tinge. No one criticised a neighbor, and no one referred to anything ecclesiastical save in tones of highest reverence. The habit of life changed. Chairs were set in tumblers, and children were perched on them gingerly, because, though it was desirable that the children should not be struck, it was also unnecessary that the tumblers should be broken. Sometimes all the female members of the family piled together upon a feather-bed, thence addressing adjurations to the male who would sit by the window, and perhaps even smoke his pipe. Thyrza looked for some such significant fin-

ish to the day; but the west shone clear and even the winds were still. Her exaltation had lasted, though now it plunged into the depth of sacrifice. She got out some squares of patchwork and sat down by the kitchen window, sewing "over 'n' over," to the amazement and admiration of her mother, who had every reason for regarding such a departure as portentous. When Mrs. Tennant rose from her chair to get supper, she paused by Thyrza to say, almost shamefacedly, because it was bad for children to be praised, —

"You've been a real good little lady all this afternoon."

Thyrza shook her head renouncingly, and sewed the faster, with minute and accurate stitches. Her mother could not know that she had given up the lesser world, moved by a consciousness of her own splendor as a leader.

Laura said nothing that afternoon and did nothing. She sat on the front step, sick at heart, and waited for Mrs. Pelton, probably holding Rosie May by the hand, to come toddling in on her weak ankles and cry for vengeance. But still nothing happened, nor did she and Thyrza, full of their guilty secret, exchange a word about the awful chances. The summer day passed and they sat on the steps and had their bread and milk. Then their mother got up, yawned widely, and wound the clock. In a moment more she was closing the doors, and they all went up to bed in the dark. Thyrza's heart was beating fast. She had felt that even at the last moment Mrs. Pelton would appear;

but the silence of the world seemed like acquiescence in her own right to judge and rule. Rosie May's play-house had been destroyed, and it was well done.

It was about two o'clock when Thyrza's eyes came open with a snap as if something had called her. The room was full of moonlight, — the brightest light, it seemed to her, that she had ever seen when the sun was gone. Even her lumpy blue pincushion, that Laura had "worked" for her with much difficulty one Christmas, was outlined on the bureau, and she could see the shining track of pins that made her name. The night was august and wonderful, but it was terrifying. At once Thyrza knew why she was awake. She had spoiled Rosie May's play-house, and even the night had no shelter for her. Laura at her side was breathing softly. When Laura was asleep she seemed to go quite away from this world, so that her mother, when she lay with her, sometimes used to put out a hand to see that the child lived. Yet Thyrza dared not wake her. Laura would be a comfort, but Thyrza was outlawed and must look for no assuaging. Her heart beat harder than it had even in her triumph, and she knew at once that her expiation must be completed alone. She slipped out of bed and found the chair where her clothes lay, and as she stood dressing she forgot her crime in the certainty of being called to a high and dreadful task. When she had put on her dress in a fantastic fashion, because she could not button it in the back and was obliged to slip her arms in as best she could and fasten it "hindside be-

fore," as she and Laura sometimes did when they were playing grown-up, she crept to the doorway. But there she stood a moment and looked at Laura. It seemed to her that she was leaving all that life held dear. She might have been going to be a missionary on India's coral strand, the beautiful pink shore she longed to see, or to the pole in search of an explorer-husband. These were possibilities she often contemplated, and now they paled beside what she really had to do. The stairs creaked under her foot, and once she heard her mother cough, with an alarming wide-awake sound. That hurried her, and in a moment she had opened the outer door and sped down the garden walk. It was a still world, and a terrible one, chiefly because it was so light. It was clear enough to see in, yet it held more than the horrors of the dark. For although she could put her hand on anything, almost as if it were day, the things of the night must be there as well, conscious of her every step.

She had reached the gate, and a dog barked,—McAdam's old Rove—and it did not seem to be the bark of Rove, but of all dogdom abroad in righteous guardianship. She fled up the path as silently as she had gone, and paused, her hand on the door. A sound came from within, a little happy sound of aunt Ellie in her bedroom crooning herself to sleep. It was the old song, "Mary across the wild moor." Sometimes, even at midnight, it rose in a strenuous wail; but no one minded, either the Tennants who heard and turned to go to sleep again, or a passing neighbor who

might not even pause to say, "That's half-witted Ellie." Until now it had seemed to Thyrza also like a personal possession of aunt Ellie's, or a habit as vital to her as breath. Now it was more. It was friendly and comforting. She stole across the front of the house and turned the corner to the bedroom window.

"Aunt Ellie," she whispered.

Aunt Ellie was there in a moment.

"That you?" she asked confidentially, though Thyrza was aware it was only a form of words.

"Aunt Ellie," said Thyrza, "you get on your clothes and come down to the gate. I want you to take a walk with me."

Aunt Ellie seemed to be dancing in the extremity of her pleasure. She did not cease to sing, but it was in gayer key. Thyrza went back again to the gate, and presently a little figure, all in white, had joined her there.

"Why, aunt Ellie," she whispered, "you've got on your nightie."

"Short gownd an' petticoat!" laughed the gleeful voice. "Short gownd an' petticoat!"

Thyrza took her hand and they went forth, trusting each other and the night. This was the road she had taken that morning in her merry mood, the stereoscope under her arm and Andy sauntering abreast. Now it was a fearsome and beautiful way, full of uncouth shadows and wonderful light. And it was the way of repentance. Old Rove heard them, and pat-

tered down the path a yard or two, with a volley of barks. Thyrza walked the slower. When she was afraid, she never could run lest panic overtake her and she dash herself into the abyss of fear itself. Then aunt Ellie broke out in a shrill, wild adaptation of her favorite stave, and Thyrza tightened her grasp on the little hand.

"Sing soft, aunt Ellie," she whispered.

It would have been of no use to tell her not to sing at all. So aunt Ellie sang soft.

They came to the play-house, and Thyrza led her little mate to a flat stone she knew.

"Sit there," she bade her. "Don't you move. I'll be through soon's I can."

Aunt Ellie sat down, and beat a noiseless tune to her song, and Thyrza, in a wild haste, set about the rebuilding of Rosie May's house. There was the pile of sticks so lately turned to fire-wood. She knew their place. How often had she looked at them and hated them for lying in a certain way because Rosie May had put them there. Now they were going back again. They fell into form as marvelously as the foundations of the Temple of Solomon. The stones that had been the tables and chairs were rigorously disposed, and the last and heaviest task of all was that of seeking out the little square footstool in the pasture where she had thrown it. The stone had bounced a long way. It seemed merry of it that morning, but hateful at night. She was afraid in the unfriendly pasture, and once there was a rustling, as if aunt Ellie had

started to go home. But at last her hands fell upon the little stone, and she hugged it to her breast for a minute, and felt she loved it. Then it was dropped into place and the task was done. Aunt Ellie was fantastically stepping back and forth in the moonlight with her shadow, but she hardly started when Thyrza ran to her and took her hand, saying, "Come, let's go home! let's go quick." The strange thing about aunt Ellie was that you could never surprise her very much if she realized you were "own folks." Now she took Thyrza's handclasp as joyously as she had accepted it in coming, and they ran along the road together as if, she must have thought, it was a merry game. But to Thyrza it was a flight.

When they got back to the house, after this amazing ordeal, nothing had changed. Thyrza could hardly believe it had all passed while her mother and Laura slept, and the house itself kept its kind indifference. Aunt Ellie was tired now. She slipped into her bedroom, with no desire to sing, and Thyrza stole upstairs. Her mother gave a little cough. It seemed the same wide-awake cough before the night's work had begun. Thyrza could not undress. She was too tired, and in the morning the first she knew of the day was that Laura, in her nightgown, her eyes big with wonder, was standing by the bed and saying, —

"Why, Thyrza Tennant! you slept in your clothes."

But she seemed a part of the dream that had begun yesterday forenoon, and Thyrza did not feel bound

to answer her; and at breakfast her mother, who was going to the Corners to get some twist and take some measurements, proved too deeply occupied with telling them when to blaze a fire for dinner to return upon the past. So the breakfast dishes were washed, and Mrs. Tennant had gone, before the deeds of yesterday began to cast even a shadow. Thyrza was feeling brave now and very good. She had made her sacrifice. She had every reason to believe all the hosts of heaven were again on her side as, in some mysterious manner, in spite of the immutability of fact, they always seemed to be. She knew she had shown extraordinary courage in going out at midnight, — for to call it midnight made it blacker yet, — and building up a play-house with her own atoning hands. And just as she lay down on the parlor sofa in the dark, to think it over and roll under her tongue the sensation of being brave and good once more, Laura appeared before her, distraught and all but speechless.

"O Thyrza!" she said, "who do you think 's comin' up to the front door? It 's Rosie May. She 's all soul alone, an' she 's got a plate."

Thyrza rose with the majesty of the school-teacher going to the board to set a sum. Her heart did, it is true, give one qualm, but she bade it down.

"I 'll go to the door," said she.

It was a new Rosie May before her, a little deprecating girl with apprehension written all over her. Even her clothes seemed to have partaken of this new abasement. Usually they were finicking clothes, all

points and patterns. Now she wore an old tyer of a miserable chocolate color that her mother had selected "for common," and that Rosie May, being wise in such matters, had refused. But this morning it looked as if she had lacked the courage to take a stand. There she was, a suppliant, holding out a plate with a clean butter-cloth covering something within.

"Mother 's been making cup-cakes," said she, in a small voice. "I brought you over two-three. We can eat 'em together."

In a flash Thyrza learned a great page of worldly wisdom, — wisdom that protects and yet is hateful in the having. Andy had foretold it long ago. "If you 'd only bat Rosie May over the head once," he had prophesied, "you would n't have no trouble with her." And Rosie May had been batted, and the trouble had ceased. This was no ogress full of evil arts. It was only a little girl like another, and she was named Rosie May.

Thyrza meant to do the thing magnificently. She knew how. It was only to bend forward with a benignant majesty and accept the cakes. Then she could say, "Come in, Rosie May. We 'll eat them together," in a tone that should imply, "If you 'll be very humble and behave yourself, and promise never to forget how you 've acted all along." But something, a kind of warm emotion, got hold of her as it often did, and she plunged out of the doorway to the step and received the cakes impetuously, call-

ing Laura as she went. Laura instantly appeared. It looked as if she had been listening. Thyrza was fervid with a perfectly beautiful solution of the situation.

"Come on down to the play-houses," she was urging. It was a blow to her to remember that Andy was gone to the Corners. She wanted the setting to be like yesterday's. "We 'll have a surprise-party, in Rosie May's play-house."

The suppliant shrank. Even Laura gave a quick reproving glance. It seemed coarse and cruel to speak thus of ruined firesides.

"I guess I 'll go home," said Rosie May timidly.

But Thyrza seized her by the hand. Now at last she knew how it felt to dominate, though for the general good.

"You 're coming to the play-house," she announced. "You 'll see! Laura, you carry the cakes. Come on!"

She raced Rosie May off down the road, and Laura followed, in patient guardianship. Laura did not know this new Thyrza. It hardly seemed possible to guess what she would do next,—even, it might be, sacrifice Rosie May in some fashion on her own desecrated hearth. Thyrza was playing now that she was a horse and trotting gig, and she rushed up to the play-house door and stopped in a way that suggested to Rosie May's perturbed imagination no lesser ordeal than "snap the whip." But Rosie May forgot her fears in what looked like even a superstitious terror.

"Why!" she breathed. "Why! my play-house!"

There it lay in its forenoon calm, the house that yesterday had tottered to its fall. Instantly Thyrza saw what a merry game it was to ignore her wonder.

"I don't see 's anything 's the matter with the play-houses," she said gayly. "Come in mine, if you don't want to open yours. Maybe yours is locked and you've forgot the key. I'll get out the table." She spread the tablecloth and laid the cup-cakes on it in a tempting triangle. "Come, Laura! Supper's ready."

But Rosie May could hardly eat. She kept taking little nibbles from the edge of her cake and looking furtively at Thyrza and the play-house. Finally she ventured, —

"Thyrza, you remember how we was down here yesterday an' all?"

"I was n't," said Thyrza, full of cup-cake and glorious invention. "Laura 'n' I went to see great-aunt Mary."

But great-aunt Mary was fifty miles away and Rosie May knew it. Laura, pale with moral awe, opened her mouth and closed it speechlessly. Rosie May looked stunned in a world too complicated for her. But in the midst of Thyrza's pride of life, a shadow fell upon her. She remembered how beautiful it was to sacrifice, and she remembered God. She fell on her knees.

"O Rosie May," she declaimed, in what was known as a prayer-meeting voice, full of minor ca-

dence, "I'm a miserable sinner. Forgive me as I trust I am now forgiven above."

Rosie May stared at her abased there on the playhouse floor, and the old look came into her face, the look of cruelty and base mastership.

"Thyrza Tennant," she began sharply, "what do you mean actin' as you do? Anybody 'd think you was in prayer-meetin', to say the least."

Thyrza caught the look. Her eyes met and held it. But hers had no answering sharpness. They were reflecting, wondering eyes. She had really found out, they said, that we are not to forget our adversary as our adversary, even after we have eaten the cup-cake of peace together. For an instant she felt the old thrill of fear. Then she remembered the little suppliant that had come bearing cakes. It was only Rosie May. She sprang to her feet.

"Yes," she said. "I guess I do remember yesterday forenoon. I tore your house down, didn't I? Well, I built it up afterwards, to see if I could remember how it went. But I 'd tear it down again if I took a notion. Come, let 's get some mulleins and trim hats."

Rosie May obediently did. She plucked the leaves and pulled the grass for strings, and when the hats were trimmed she admired Thyrza's way of doing, and asked for directions, quite like a milliner's apprentice. Laura looked on in wonder. She had always known this was only Rosie May, but somehow she suspected Thyrza had been a long time finding it out.

III

THE GOLDEN APPLE

I

One day when Thyrza was a little over fourteen she sat in the orchard eating an "August sweet," and, as she ate, breaking into the beautiful regular chambers where the brown seeds lay. She was counting the seeds. Thyrza counted a great deal at this time. Now it was a flower with florets or regular petals, or it was even the number of leaves on a spray. Always her voice, as she counted, beat on the words, "yes, no, yes, no," in an earnest monotone. "Yes" meant that before she should be too old she might go to some young ladies' academy and learn the things that make people great. "No" meant that she could never go at all, and that the rest of her life would be spent here in Leafy Road, keeping the bread sweet and covering the squashes in a frost, and even making little thick stubbed trousers, like her mother, and taking her pay in "sass." To-day, as she reached "yes," her mother's voice smote shrilly upon her from the house.

"Thyrza! Laura! Where be you?"

Thyrza knew where Laura was. She had gone with Andy McAdam over to the old cider-mill, with a peck of apples tugged between them, to see if they

could start up the mill and make it go. Andy had a strong disbelief that anything short of a horse could turn the great wooden screw, but he was willing to risk walking three-quarters of a mile on the chance, and he was prepared to assert, and indeed had sworn it, that a peck of apples would make as much as a quart of cider, if you could only squeeze it out. They had been willing that Thyrza should go, — not glad but willing, because her perennial hopefulness was hindering on such solemn expeditions; but Barton Gorse had that day given her the "Age of Fable," and she had to read it very fast and all at once. And when she found out what a beautiful book it was, she had to stop in a fever and count her apple-seeds, to see if she was to read such books all her life.

"Thyrza," came her mother's voice. "Laura! You step yourselves here."

Mrs. Tennant had, when she was hurried or busy, the crudest phrases ready to her lips; but they never purported displeasure with the children. They were the sharpest weapons she could find to cut at circumstance, and she used them for utility's sake. Thyrza took her answer from the apple-seed she had reached at "yes," and rising slowly, threw the rest away.

This was the answer she wanted, and she told herself speciously that since her mother called her, she must go, and take it for a finality. But half-way up the narrow path worn by children's feet to the orchard play-corners, she stopped, considered, and then ran back. With a passionate determination to play the

game in honor, she dropped on the ground and picked up all the seeds she could find; but when she had finished her count, still it ended on "yes." Then, with a satisfied delight in her own deep sense of probity, she clapped her book under her arm and sped up the orchard path. Mrs. Tennant had done calling, but she stood in the doorway, shading her eyes with her hand. It was as if she had been seeking so earnestly that she forgot to go in when her children failed to come. In the other hand she held a letter, and Thyrza felt instantly excited at the unusualness of that. A letter might signify anything. Her mother looked down at her abstractedly. It almost seemed that, although she was seeking a listener, she was prepared to give her own comments and answers.

"Well," she said, "your great-aunt Mary Hubbard 's comin'."

Thyrza's face took on deepest meaning.

"O mother!" she cried. And then, "O fudge!"

Her mother was not listening. She opened the letter again, a meagre missive on a half-sheet of ruled paper, and held it far away. She had mislaid her glasses, and having once tasted the news in the note, there was no time to find them. "There's more of it," she continued, frowning. "I can't hardly make it out —"

"Let me have it," said Thyrza, with the lavish helpfulness of one to whom glasses are yet fifty years away. "She says — O mother! mother!" The word ended in a little cry of joy, of terror. The apple-seeds had told the truth, and like older suppliants of necromancy,

Thyrza was dismayed at the plainness of the answer.

"She wants to take one of us, Laura or me, to live with her for three years, and see if she can't make something of us."

Her mother was regarding her in wonder.

"Well," she said, at length, "I never should ha' thought you'd be bewitched to go an' live with great-aunt Mary Hubbard."

Thyrza met her wondering eyes with the vivid starlight look she wore when the world seemed to her as it did in gay moments, a beautiful plaything waiting for her to toss.

"But see!" she cried, "see what she says. She'll send us to the academy, and let us have lessons on Arabella's piano, — Arabella that died. O mother, three years aren't much! In three years I could learn everything at the academy and play the piano, and I should be home."

"Well, for mercy sakes," returned Mrs. Tennant, "so you've got it all settled. Don't she say you or Laura? How'd you know it's goin' to be you?"

Thyrza gave one fleeting confirmatory glance at the letter, but did not blench.

"Laura don't want to go," she responded joyously. "She just hates school. She hates great-aunt Mary, too, just as much as I do; but I'd go with —" She had brought up against the name of an eminent and very wicked personage Andy was in the habit of invoking in moments of deep emotion, but concluded not to

mention him. "I'd go with anybody—for three years," she ended weakly.

Mrs. Tennant still stood looking at her. She knew all about Thyrza's desire for seminaries and music and high places, but she had never seen the lure in evidence. Already it had wrought strange wonders. This little girl with the glowing cheeks and brilliant eyes hardly seemed to be her own daughter at all. Mrs. Tennant was uncertain whether to be proud of having a child who was so "smart," or to recognize the pain in her own heart, premonitory of parting.

"Well," she said, at this point, "I guess I 'll go in an' se' down. My knees feel kinder weak."

Thyrza did not go in with her. Though her own knees were unwontedly strong, she sat down on the step and read the letter over and over, as if she might spy out a little more of great-aunt Mary Hubbard's mind. And when at dusk Laura came draggling in, ciderless but still happy, because Andy had taken her on a mile farther to see a litter of pups, she only yawned when Thyrza plunged at her down the garden-path and thrust the letter on her. Laura read it with some difficulty, and then yawned wider. She was not really used to aunt Mary's hand, and anything connected with paper and ink had, to her mind, a scholastic nature and was to be avoided. She put the half-sheet into its folds and gave it back.

"Anything for supper?" she asked, with a robust interest.

"Laura, don't you see?" cried Thyrza, in her most

imperative tone. "She 'll take one of us for three years, three to five years."

"I guess she will," said Laura, beginning her sturdy march supperward. "I would n't live with her if she was all gold-diamonds, an' I 'll tell her so, too. I don't want none of her education," continued Laura loftily, declining, in the rigor of argument, upon a conclusion that had never occurred to her before. "She need n't trouble herself. I guess I know enough now."

"But it's to use Arabella's piano."

"Fush on Arabella's piano! I 've heard about Arabella's piano till I 'm sick an' tired of it."

Laura had some curiously mature styles of expression, and they always seemed appropriate to her. She used them with entire simplicity, and they fell as they did from her mother's lips.

Mrs. Tennant was very silent that night, and no one spoke of the letter. Thyrza had a list of prepositions to learn, but she left the book face downward on the table and walked back and forth through the room. She could not calm herself. Outside there was a thick mist driving in, and once, when her thoughts seemed burning her up, she went out and ran back and forth in front of the house, and reappeared, her cheeks and her hair wet with little globes. Laura, by the window, had forgotten the letter. She was trying to teach the cat to jump over her hands, and puss, in sulks, flattened herself to the ground and put back her ears. Mrs. Tennant was sewing with her short quick stitches, mending a rent in a little coat, and

when Thyrza came in she looked up at her briefly and sighed. But Thyrza did not hear the sigh. She was thinking about aunt Mary's Arabella's piano.

In two days aunt Mary Hubbard came. When the girls got home from school she was there, and they knew it, not only because the parlor shades were up, but because their mother, warm and tired, and with a worried triangular wrinkle between the eyes, met them at the gate and bade them, in a tone of sharp anxiety, to be sure and not make any noise; aunt Mary had one of her headaches.

"No, I ain't either, Clary," came that masterful voice from the house. "Not now, anyways. I guess I've managed to stave it off. Let 'em come right in here an' tell me whether they've been good girls." It was among aunt Mary's ill qualities that she could hear more and see more to the general disadvantage than was to be expected of normal ears and eyes, and she was always candidly ready to act upon her garnered knowledge. At once the children found themselves combating their old mood of resistance. "Come right in here," she called again. "I ain't seen any little girls for quite a spell."

They turned in at the parlor door, invested suddenly with awkwardness. There she was by the window, her crochet-work in her large, smooth hands. It was one of their quarrels with her, based on an unwilling admiration, that she was always crocheting while their mother had to sew on thick, unpleasant clothes. Thyrza realized, with a sudden throb of horror at

herself and her glorious future, that she did actually hate aunt Mary. There were fewer people and things to be hated all the time, now, but aunt Mary never ceased to loom in a bulk deserving of all dislikes compounded. She was so large, so fresh-colored, with the little red veins on her cheek-bones, her forehead shone so, and her gold-bowed glasses did so glitter. She was tall and portly and tightly corseted, and her glossy black silk had innumerable ruffles round the bottom, and above them as many rows of velvet. But the adjunct which Thyrza could never forgive her was her wide scalloped collar, with its precise œilets worked by those same smooth hands. She had over and over again seen aunt Mary sitting and making œilets, stabbing the collar with a fine precision, and then buttonholing the round she had made; and this was at the very time, on one winter day, when Mrs. Tennant had been obliged to sew herself into a pain in her side, to finish a pair of trousers for the grange. "She might at least," thought Thyrza passionately, on that day, "have offered to hem a leg, while mother faced the top." But no! she sat there stabbing œilets in a pattern, and estimating Mrs. Tennant's household expenses, and telling her meat was n't so wholesome after all, and it certainly did cost terribly. Indeed, there seemed to be a fate for Thyrza in the very sound of œilets, for that winter she failed on the word in a spelling-match, and stupid Rosie May had gone above her.

But now the two girls, clutching at their books, as

a safeguard of some incomprehensible sort, stood foolishly before the monitory guest, and their mother, in the background, regarded them with an uneasy shame, because they hardly seemed to be doing what was expected of them; then she glanced at aunt Mary in a pervasive humbleness.

Aunt Mary let fall her work, and looked up over her glasses with the particular effect of brow which, as even children know, conveys reproof.

"Stand up straight, Thyrza," she admonished her. "I don't know wherever you got that kind o' shoulders."

Thyrza gave a miserable little shrug, and then crouched into her former abasement. She knew quite well that when she ran with the cat over her shoulders they were straight enough, but craven timidity before one who was kin to her only in blood was bowing her little frame. Aunt Mary was still regarding them with the terrible stare of one who is about to buy. Then she began to talk about them to their mother, as if they were articles of merchandise. Laura bore it very well. She still had no wish to please aunt Mary, and she saw no reason why any person who could speak the language should not say in her presence that she had great-uncle Pike's fresh complexion and Martha Pearson's nose. But Thyrza stood in a scarlet rage, feeling all the recoil of an invaded personality. She forgot the neat speeches she had in readiness to make aunt Mary see that her bounty was appreciated. "Is the course very se-

vere at the academy?" she had meant to say, or, at a moment of great daring, when aunt Mary was softened by the prospect of having a little girl come to live with her, "I shall be very careful of Arabella's piano." But she could not have offered these neat conceptions now, had her whole academic course depended on it. Suddenly aunt Mary took off her glasses altogether, and fixed the children with the direct glance of her small, determined eyes.

"Well," she said, "which little girl wants to live with me the most?"

Thyrza became aware in wonder that Laura was actually returning the glance with unmoved fearlessness, and she realized also that, after that discovery, she could not do the same. She knew the reason, too. Laura did not want to go. There was nothing in aunt Mary's gift that she in the least desired. But Thyrza, afflicted by a kind of shame, was sensible that she desired the things aunt Mary had to give, but that she hated the prospect of three years of œilets and inquiring looks with a vehemence not to be mitigated even by the vision of Arabella's piano. Conscious of her greed and her ingratitude, she dropped the lids over her contrite eyes. Mrs. Tennant had put out a hand and laid it on Thyrza's shoulder. The touch seemed like an endearment.

"This is the one," she said, "that thinks she better go."

Aunt Mary turned the ray of her inquisitive vision full upon Thyrza shrinking in her shame.

"She does, does she?" said aunt Mary. "Well, we'll see which pleases me the best."

Then, somehow, after an awkward battle of precedence they got out of the room, and they did not see aunt Mary again until supper-time, when she rebuked their mother for admitting them to the feast of cream-of-tartar biscuits she was herself bountifully enjoying, with the fiat, "If 't was a child of mine, she should n't set her lips to hot bread nor, least of all, a pie."

After supper, as Mrs. Tennant was putting away the milk, Thyrza appeared suddenly under her elbow, lifted to set the pan on a high shelf, away from the cat.

"Mother," she whispered, "I want to go over to Mr. Gorse's and carry him back his book."

"Well," said her mother, "you come home 'fore dark." She, too, was impressed with the advisability of thinning the social atmosphere while aunt Mary stayed.

Thyrza took her book under her arm and fled up the darkening road. The old Gorse house was half a mile away, and she knew whatever bogies there were she could escape by a sudden flight into a friendly dooryard. It was not so the other way, where the great poplar stood, its leaves perpetually whispering. When she stepped into its shadow like a haunted room, she always frightened herself anew by saying over in her mind a verse she had read in one of Barton Gorse's books: —

> "Like one that on a lonesome road,
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned round, walks on
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread."

Sometimes it was the frightful fiend that was the most terrible; sometimes it was the pursuing elephant. But to-night it was quite different. She was on the friendly road, and even the vague excitement of aunt Mary's visit helped to keep her heart up. Her blood went faster, and she began to run when she was at the big white gate, and, playing she was a horse and coach, she went up the driveway in a whirl.

II

Barton Gorse was sitting on the veranda, his long legs over the rail. There were voices from the kitchen in the ell — Michael and his sister Katie, who had kept the house for old Judge Gorse, and who now stayed on while the young grandson came to inherit. Barton Gorse was very lonely in his earthly state. He had one sister who lived mysteriously apart from him, and when his grandfather died he seemed to find comfort in staying at the old place, reading his book and lounging along the river in his boat, day and night companioned only by Michael and Katie. The townsfolk had a liking for him, though his solitary habits marked him "as odd as Dick's hatband." He was not very strong, they knew, but whether he was consumptive or not they could not tell. When

they asked him, he only smiled. But he had one playfellow. Since the time when Thyrza had "given out," as the neighbors said, at the Old Folks' Concert and he had carried her from the hall, he had kept up a kindly, persistent interest in her, and when he learned what her ambitions were, he had loaned her books and talked to her about the world.

To-night, when she came galloping up the driveway with the rhythm of horse's hoofs, he knew who it was, and pulled down his feet and smiled. Thyrza, when she became aware that some one was on the veranda, bade the horse "whoa!" in a whisper, and walked up the steps demurely. She was often shy with him, and always a little removed. He had a serious dignity, though he joked a good deal, and she was dimly aware that this was because she was a little girl and he wished to be polite to her. He could not treat her quite like a grown-up lady. He had to make a special manner for her. Barton Gorse always knew what people were thinking. So it was no wonder he guessed at this instant that Thyrza was not only Thyrza but a horse.

"Shall I help you out of the carriage?" said he.

Thyrza was delighted all over. It seemed to put them in the same world, and this was charming; for into her foolish country she had found no one as yet to go.

"I 'm out," she said joyously. "Here, I 've brought your book. Thank you ever so much." A thought of great-aunt Mary at home encased in the pro-

prieties, and knowing indubitably in every event what a little girl should say, prompted the tardy gratitude.

"Want another?" He had risen, and she knew just how he looked though she could scarcely see him through the dusk: thin, with the aquiline nose and beautiful blue eyes that seemed so at variance with the fine straight black hair above. Everybody liked Barton Gorse, except those very near him who were exasperated with him for being lazy; and even they, when they saw him smile, had to own they loved him. It was a melancholy face in rest, but when the thin, big mouth parted over his white teeth, his cheeks wrinkled up into the most infectious mirth, the recognition of one who sees that although life may be unexpected and unpleasant, yet it is very amusing indeed. Thyrza did want a book, but she could not talk about it at once. She took the little rocking-chair that was always on the veranda now, beside Barton's big one. He had not told her that he kept it for her, but it seemed to be her chair.

"She 's come," said Thyrza. There were pounds of emphasis in the words.

Barton seated himself.

"Aunt Sarah?" he prompted her.

"Great-aunt Mary."

"How soon is she going to take you away?"

"That 's it," said Thyrza, in a whisper. "Oh, I could n't bear it!"

"Well, you want to go."

"I've got to go," said Thyrza fiercely. "Should you think she'd want me till fall?"

"It's like the story of the Golden Apples, isn't it?" said Barton Gorse, temporizing. He was aware of the warring desires in the little ambitious heart.

"But that was the prettiest one," said Thyrza. "Laura's better looking than me, and nicer. Only she doesn't want to go."

"Still, I think it's a good deal like the Golden Apples. Listen! what do you hear?"

There was a thin little sighing cry from the kitchen. Then the lament broke into baby barks. Thyrza forgot aunt Mary and the piano. She sprang to her feet.

"It's a dog!" she cried loudly. "It's a puppy!"

"Wait a minute. We'll see."

He went round to the kitchen door and held a colloquy with Katie. Presently he returned with something in his hands. It sniveled and squirmed in a fat way, and made little ineffectual attempts to love all the world and destroy it at once. This blubbering atom of life was deposited in Thyrza's lap, and she got her hands on it.

"Oh, my!" she kept saying. "It is a puppy. Mr. Gorse, it's a darling puppy."

Barton Gorse knew exactly how she felt. He had the same sensations over young and wriggling things.

"He'll yelp his head off, I'm afraid," said he. "I've got to go up to town for a week, and Katie

can't mother him as much as he expects. You don't want to keep him for me, do you?"

Thyrza clutched the little soft body to her breast. "Oh!" she breathed, "could I?"

"I'd be ever so much obliged. Katie'd be nice to him, but she has n't much time to hold his hand. Want him to-night?"

"I guess I'll be going," said Thyrza, rising, her legacy clasped immutably.

"Wait a minute. I'll walk home with you."

"I guess I'll be going," cried Thyrza. She was half-way down the drive. Her clear young voice throbbed with pleasure, and he smiled to hear it. "Thank you ever so much."

Barton Gorse kept on smiling to himself. "Poor little kid!" he said aloud. Somehow he had a foreboding that the academic sojourn with aunt Mary was not going to be altogether fortunate, and he had hit on something to give the child a little foolish pleasure before she should go.

Thyrza, scudding through the night, had a certitude of richness such as she had never known. Of course she preferred books to anything else, but now she had not a book but a dog, and her feelings ran away with her. She clutched the little body with firm yet passionate hands, and held her cheek close to the baby head and its silky ears. It was a spaniel, and she remembered she did not even know its name. "I shall call you for him," she whispered. "Barton! Barton! Darling!"

Mrs. Tennant and aunt Mary were sitting in the dark, and Laura had gone up to bed. Laura had pronounced ideas in some directions, and she could not sit in the room while aunt Mary told the time-worn story of uncle Chad's illness without feeling sleepy. Once upstairs she crept up on her mother's bed, and lay there without undressing. She knew she should not go to sleep, and it seemed to her she needed just this time to think about changing the walls of her play-house. But in five minutes she was off.

Thyrza came into the sitting-room with a rush. Not even aunt Mary could stay the torrent of her joy.

"O mother," she cried, in the shrillness of delight, "what you s'pose I 've got?"

She deposited the little guest in her mother's lap. He was sleepy by this time, but he had the instinctive good manners to put out his ready tongue and lick Mrs. Tennant's hand. She was very tired. A day with aunt Mary represented the top notch of emotion. It was warfare of a sort,— retreat, advance, a volley when you least expected. To-night there was another reason why she should be, as she said, as nervous as a witch. There was work to be finished, and if she could have had her sewing to decline upon, she might have pricked momentary emotion into hem and seam. But aunt Mary had decreed that it was terrible foolish to use up oil in summer-time, and Mrs. Tennant sat with folded hands, and these idle fingers the red tongue found.

"For heaven's sake!" cried Mrs. Tennant. She

pushed back her chair, and came to her feet. "Thyrza Tennant, what under the sun you got?"

Thyrza had rescued her charge. She tucked him under her chin for safe keeping, and held him in a tender grasp.

"Why, mother," said she, all a bubbling happiness, "it 's only a puppy."

"Only a puppy!" echoed aunt Mary. "Thyrza, you put him right outdoors, where he belongs. No wonder your mother 's scairt, bringin' strange dogs in here as you do."

Thyrza laughed, a happy little giggle. It seemed possible to think anything was funny if you had a puppy under your chin. Aunt Mary rose and opened the screen door.

"Here," said she, "you put him out, an' tell him to go home where he belongs. Come! I can't hold this door open. I hear a skeeter now."

Thyrza saw herself brought straight up to the wall of sacrifice, and sacrifice was what she adored; only she had always assumed that she should not be called on to relinquish anything like a puppy, a little warm soft thing you could hold under your chin, and that would cry all night if you put him out alone. She took a step toward her mother.

"Mother!" she called. "Mother!"

Mrs. Tennant sounded very uncertain.

"There, Thyrza, I guess you better do as your aunt Mary says. We can't have strange dogs in here by night."

"Mother, he ain't a strange dog. He's only a puppy."

"Well!" said Mrs. Tennant. Then she waited, not knowing what else to do, and Thyrza let loose the torrent of her defense.

"He's Barton Gorse's puppy, and Barton Gorse is going to be away a whole week, and the puppy 'll cry all the time, and Katie'd be good to him, but that's all."

Mrs. Tennant recognized a certain indomitable note in her child's voice. She had heard it there before, and had neither feared it nor really yielded, though she had been obliged to consider it in a respectful wonder. But this was not the time for controversy, with aunt Mary as voluntary umpire. She rose and opened the door into the shed.

"I guess we may's well leave him in here, long's it's night," she said weakly to aunt Mary over her shoulder. "Barton Gorse is a real nice young man an' he ain't very well."

So Thyrza and the puppy passed out into the shed, and the door was shut upon them. The screen door banged violently, and aunt Mary paused a moment in the kitchen before ascending to her room.

"You need n't light me a lamp," said she. "I'd ruther by far have a candle in summer-time. Never in my life did I see such carryin's on." Then she, too, was gone.

Mrs. Tennant paused for a moment to reflect on the singular dispersal of her household when aunt Mary camped within it. Laura was in retreat upstairs,

Thyrza languished in exile, and aunt Ellie, who had "been plummin'" vigorously all day, had crept home to steal a bite from the dairy-shelf and slip into her bedroom, where she stayed as still as a wild creature in its burrow. There was no singing of "Mary across the wild moor" until aunt Mary's shadow was lifted from the sill.

Mrs. Tennant waited until the heavy tread above had, after some disquieting renewals, plainly ceased. Then she went to the shed door to whisper, "You there?"

Thyrza was perched on the old chopping-block. Its irregularities were distressing, and only the tips of her toes reached the floor; but she nursed the puppy and forgot her banishment. At her mother's voice she rose and slipped into the kitchen. Mrs. Tennant regarded the little beast, lying now in an impotence of sleep.

"Well!" she commented, "he's a kind of a cunnin' little creatur'. Black as a crow!"

Thyrza had deposited him on the calico-covered lounge, and now, being more familiar with the ways of cats than of dogs, she tried to round him into a ball because it seemed to her it would be more luxurious to him.

"See, mother," she said movingly, "ain't he the prettiest?"

But Mrs. Tennant had had her moment of approval.

"I guess we better take him out into the barn," she considered; but Thyrza dashed at her.

"O mother, you would n't do a thing like that! I thought you liked dogs."

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Tennant, "I like 'em well enough in their place."

"Besides he 'd cry all night. She 'd hear him," offered Thyrza, with a subtlety of impulse.

That was true, Mrs. Tennant could well believe.

"Well, what you goin' to do?" she inquired.

Thyrza gathered him, with a swift motion, into her arms.

"He can sleep on the foot of my bed," she declared, on her way to the staircase. "I 'll give him the old brown shawl."

She was gone before her mother could say her nay. Mrs. Tennant locked the doors and she also went upstairs. She did not go into the children's room. It seemed to her that it was better not to know. So she deftly peeled off Laura's clothing and rolled her into bed, and then, with a sigh of physical tiredness, dropped down beside her. She felt like saying her prayers that night, and leaving Thyrza and the puppy to God, Whom she would also have asked to protect them all from aunt Mary. But to her God was the God of Eternal Sabbaths and unreasonable though doubtless praiseworthy wrath, and she could not trouble Him.

The next morning, when the others met at the breakfast-table, Thyrza was in the barn, ecstatically feeding the puppy from her own glass of milk.

"Where 's that dog?" inquired aunt Mary.

"I guess Thyrza's put him out some'er's," returned Mrs. Tennant guiltily.

"Where's Thyrza?"

"Laura," said Mrs. Tennant, shifting the responsibility, "where's your sister?"

Laura looked at her mother and then at aunt Mary. She had probably never told a lie in her life, but now she said calmly, not knowing why she said it, "Thyrza's gone over to Mis' McAdam's to borrow the Sunday-school question-book."

Mrs. Tennant narrowed her gaze and looked at her piercingly. She opened her mouth and closed it. Then she poured the coffee. Aunt Mary, being occupied in receiving her cup, strangely did not pursue the question further.

The next three days were periods of warfare and evasion. Thyrza and Laura took turns in amusing their little guest, secreted in the barn and taken for short walks after dusk. It was ticklish business, though there grew to be the wildest pleasure in it, and by reason of the strain, they had the seeming of two very gentle and serious little girls. This was when they were in the house, always with their ears pricked to catch the sound of a betraying yelp. At the end of the third day, aunt Mary called them before her. She wore the guise of an excellent humor.

"Now," said she, "who's goin' home to live with me?"

Laura looked stolidly past her. The quest was not for her. Thyrza trembled. She forced herself to meet

aunt Mary's eye, but her throat felt parched, and she could only begin miserably, —

"If you 'd take me, aunt Mary—"

There she stayed, and aunt Mary seemed in a way to be mollified by her confusion. It was fitting on an occasion of such grandeur.

"Well," she returned graciously, "I guess you 're the one that wants it. So if you 've took it upon yourself to try — What under the heaven 's that?"

It was the sound of a rush and scurry down the stairs and the advent of a little black demon of a puppy. He bore aunt Mary's bonnet in his mouth and tripped in it outrageously. Some remaining shreds of the veil were clinging to his ears. Thyrza, at a glance, knew that he was a wrecker of fortunes as well as bonnets, but she opened her mouth wide and broke into ecstatic laughter. Laura, on whom the irony of the event had not yet fallen, sprang on him and snatched the bonnet. She had it, all but one string, and that he held in his determined teeth, worrying it, bracing his feet and pulling back with all the force of evil, growling meantime satanically. But somehow Laura got the string, and immediately aunt Mary was holding a distorted thing in her hand, repeating tragically, —

"That 's my bunnit. That 's my bunnit an' my veil."

The puppy, in a sportive oblivion to the disaster he had wrought, dived under her dress, seeking out her ankles, and again Laura fell upon him. She dragged

him forth, thrust him outside the screen door, and by a happy inspiration, threw her slipper after him. If he had something to worry, Laura knew, he would keep himself busy. She returned breathless to a triumph she had not foreseen.

"You come here," said aunt Mary. She laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder. "You're a good little girl. You're the one for me."

Mrs. Tennant, not yet included in the fateful moment, was coming calmly in.

"Clary," aunt Mary cried, "I've made my choice. It's this one." She gave Laura a little confirmatory shake, and Laura, without a word, stampeded out of the house. Thyrza ran after her, and overtook her in the orchard. Thyrza had scooped up the puppy on the way, and he had retained his solacing shoe. Now Laura snatched it from him and put it on her foot. She was white with anger.

"Why," she said, "I would n't no more go an' live with her—"

Thyrza, too, was white with the agony of loss. Arabella's piano stood before her eyes. She could almost hear it playing sad tunes of renunciation and farewell.

"Laura Tennant," said she, "you 've got to."

Laura, her foot in air, and the slipper half-buttoned, looked up at her, wild-eyed.

"I'd like to know why I've got to?" she inquired, with a faithful reproduction of her mother's directness.

Thyrza stood before her, hands clasped in the intensity of her appeal.

"Don't you see," she cried vehemently, "if I can't go, you've got to? You've got to learn everything at the academy and tell me. You've got to play on Arabella's piano, and maybe you can come home sometimes, and you can show me, on the bureau or something, and then when I have a piano, it won't be too late. O Laura, you've got to go!"

When Thyrza said, "you've got to," Laura never lingered. She gave her now one long, miserable look, and then unbuttoned her slipper, as if for occupation, and fell to buttoning it again. To Thyrza the look was not very different from others when Laura had yielded against her will. She had had experience of that round face drained of its color, those despairing eyes; but this time she could not ignore it. The face stayed with her afterwards; it was to be with her always.

Laura finished fumbling with her shoes. She got up and said briefly, —

"Come, le's go in."

Somehow Thyrza did not dare speak to her again about what was to be, and no one said very much until bed-time. Then aunt Mary, on her way upstairs, candle in hand, paused at the door.

"I shall be goin' by day arter to-morrer," she announced. "Clary, you have Laura ready to go with me."

After she had made her exit, the three sat there in

a dry-eyed misery. Laura knew nothing could save her, and she did not ask to be saved. Thyrza knew it, too. Somebody must go out to bottle the spring of knowledge and bring it home. If she herself could not ride on the quest, it must be Laura. The mother had thoughts they could not share, and never guessed at all until they were grown up and these agonies were but the hardships of a remembered past. Aunt Mary had money. Mrs. Tennant did not want it for herself; her own simple life, all scantily paid work and no certainties, sufficed her. But she had at her heart the one golden hope of aunt Mary's remembering the children in her will. If aunt Mary were offended, that could not be. So she, too, dedicated little silent Laura to be the sacrifice.

The first cricket of the year was chirping that night. It seemed to Thyrza the saddest sound she had ever heard. The puppy had been shut ruthlessly in the barn, and when he yelped no one offered to go to him. Once Mrs. Tennant glanced inquiringly at Thyrza, and Thyrza answered from her misery,—

"Let him cry."

Then suddenly Laura rose and, keeping her face away from them, went upstairs. They followed presently, and found her undressing mechanically in the room that had been hers and Thyrza's ever since they could remember. Mrs. Tennant paused at the door a moment.

"You better shut that west winder," she advised dryly, "not have the breeze on you all night;" and

when they were ready for bed, she appeared again, in her nightgown. She looked old and worn. The last half-hour seemed to have done something to her. She looked past Thyrza, miserably weeping into her bureau drawer, which for some reason she elected to put in order at that time, and her gaze rested upon Laura with yearning and invitation.

"Don't you want to come into mother's room?" she asked, and Laura, saying nothing, went.

For those two nights she slept in her mother's arms, and Thyrza was by herself. There were two silent days, as arid as the intervals of drought in a thirsty land. And on the third day at dusk Thyrza stood by the gate alone and looked down the road. That was the way Laura had gone, a firm figure, but a very little one beside aunt Mary's bulk, in the "accommodation" ordered to take them to the train. There at the gate Barton Gorse found her. He came striding along the road, very gayly, whistling a march. He had come home two days earlier to see her, fearing lest she should be gone. He walked up to her, confidently smiling. When he saw her face, his own grew grave.

"What is it?" he asked. Thyrza was looking at him in the frankest misery. "What is it?" he repeated.

"Laura's gone."

"Gone where?"

"With great-aunt Mary."

He pursed his lips a moment. Then his face grew tender.

"Was it the Golden Apple, then?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Aunt Mary chose her?"

She nodded again. Barton Gorse stood there a long time, looking at her. His own life, in its future possibilities, passed before him, as her life was rushing before her. He was wondering how much he could pledge.

"Thyrza," he said.

She looked up quickly, his voice was so gentle, so kind, as he had fitted it to her need. He spoke very quickly, as if he might be betraying more of his intimate self than he had meant to.

"Thyrza, I 'm not good for much in some ways. I 'm not very fit. O Lord, I can't talk about it! but you won't tell. I can't bang about like other fellows. I 've got to be studious, all that, you know." She was looking at him with clear, sorrowful eyes, wondering what was coming, because he seemed to be forgetting her grief and craving sympathy for himself. Yet it was not sympathy, she knew at once. "I can live where I like," he said awkwardly. "I shall be here a lot. I will be here, I promise you. I 'll be your tutor. You won't have to go to aunt Mary's, even for a piano."

She looked at him for a moment in the incredulous joy of such a promise. Then her sorrow overwhelmed her, and she leaned forward on the fence and sobbed, —

"It is n't that. It is n't pianos, nor learning, nor the academy. It 's Laura — Laura — Laura!"

IV

THE KNIGHT OF ELD

I

It was when Thyrza was only a little over fifteen that Barton Gorse's uncle, Terry Updike, came home from Europe with an impelling desire of finding out what his nephew was like, and why he had not only failed to establish himself in some profession at home, but had not even gone over to do indefinite things abroad. Terry Updike was a writer of books, the brother of Barton's mother, and he had for years elected to live in England. It seemed to him that there was something difficult to be understood in the way Barton had settled down at Leafy Road after his grandfather's death. The boy had an older sister in America, and he must also have ambitions, hot blood to be cooled, even intemperances to be outworked. It was not like youth in a strenuous time to take on the habits of middle age, and settle beside stagnant waters. So, with an irritated sense of doing a foolish thing, he broke the established habit of his life — a winter's work in Devon, the London season, and summer on the Continent — and set sail for America. Barton, when he found he was coming, had proposed a dutiful meeting in New York as soon as he should land; but that his uncle definitely refused. He wanted, though this he did not say, to come down to

Leafy Road and see for himself the environment that had either relaxed the lad or enchanted him.

Thyrza was taking lessons of Barton every day now. They were reading Virgil, and she felt very learned. One afternoon she looked up from her sight reading with a flushed face, beseeching in every line to be commended. She was a glutton for praise; she never got enough, and however fat with it she was, a word of reproof reduced her to penury. Barton sat leaning back in his chair, tapping his lips with a pencil and smiling. He was thinking what a queer little girl she was, how fierce in her devotions, how self-centred and bent upon certain rewards that, from his circumscribed area of outlook, he thought were more valuable to men than to women. Barton had not known many differing types of people, and it sometimes seemed to him that Thyrza was the very queerest child he had ever met, and the least fitted to be a woman. She was so bent upon distinction, upon things that, he believed, belonged to what they called the intellectual life, and so burningly anxious to be cognizant of emotions with large names. Yet after all she was only a thin child with big eyes and freckles on her nose, dressed, most of the time, in a brown calico pathetically serviceable. To-day he had something to break to her. They sat in the faded, sombre room known as the library at the Gorse house, though there were but few books, because Judge Gorse had kept his law library in the little office out in the grounds. But the books here were in old leather

bindings that gave forth a pungent smell. The chairs were covered in worn leather with brass tacks, and everything looked dignified and old. The room was always in order and always clean, but it affected sharp young senses, fresh from outdoor challenges, with a deadening as of things left a long time to grow musty and decay.

Thyrza looked up suddenly from her book and Barton noted how bright her eyes were, like those of some inquisitive young animal.

"This room smells like poison," said she.

Barton sprang to his feet.

"Heavens! Do you mean the air's bad?" Then, as the door and all the windows were open, and he could do nothing, he sat down again.

Thyrza was shocked at her implication.

"Oh, no, sir," she hastened to say. "I guess what I mean is it smells like an old book we've got. It's about poisoners. It's an awful old book — a very old book — and this air's just like it. I guess it's only the smell of leather."

"Well, you need n't scare a chap to death, with your poisons."

Thyrza sat contentedly with her eyes fixed on the time-softened backs of Michelet's France, in a kind of worshipful muse. It seemed as if there were nothing on earth so wonderful as to live in a quiet room and read from one book and look up to see another waiting for her.

"Only to think," she said wonderingly, "there's

just that one book at home, — except the Bible, — and here there's more than I could read in a month."

"Help yourself, Dryasdust," said Barton recklessly. "Drink deep. If any young woman can drown dull care in Gibbonses without regard to ribbonses (I thought of that this minute, talking right along just as I am now! ain't I smart!), why, I'm not the man to curb her. Well!" He settled himself again, and began beating an accompaniment to his words with the pencil on his palm. He was often shy before Thyrza's intellectual curiosities. The pencil was a pedagogical symbol that kept him in heart. "We can't have more than an hour a day for a while," he announced. "My uncle's coming."

Thyrza looked at him and blanched. In her strangely alternated nature she had as wild a belief in ill fortune as in good. Her fears served to balance her outrageous hopes. "It's all over," her heart said, while she continued to look at him respectfully. "The Virgil will stop, the French will never be begun, and I shan't be educated."

Barton was continuing, —

"My uncle Terry is on his way here from England. He's going to visit me. So till I see what his habits are and how much he wants of me, we'd better cut down our time a little."

"Yes, sir," said Thyrza. Then she added with timidity, for she sometimes had an impression that Barton smiled at her when she offered unsolicited

opinions on matters connected with the intellectual life, "He writes beautiful books."

Barton smiled this time, only rather absently. Thyrza responded with an inward shiver. Something within her, as raw as vanity, forbade her to seem to make a mistake, which, in the intellectual life, she felt, would be irreparable. That life was a winged flight from mountain top to top. One must never lose pinions and fall fluttering, broken-winged, into the valley.

"He 's written an awful lot," said Barton, with a species of indulgence toward an uncle who served strange gods. "I don't see what he wants in America. Well, anyhow he 's coming, and we 'll cut down our time till we see what the old chap likes."

Thyrza, speeding home that afternoon along the road, foot deep now in yellow and red leaves, felt passionately sad and yet extremely happy at recognizing her feeling. The day was all soft reminders and sweet consolations, a touch in it of hottest summer, and yet tempered with the benignity of the end. All the mists of the world, she thought, had flown together into one purple bloom that veiled the hills and made the farther woods enchanted barriers. And nearer there was, in homely imitation, the curling upward of smoke from the neighborhood chimneys, where a score of houses made ready for tea. It was a wonderfully beautiful autumn, and Thyrza was tremblingly happy in it, with an undercurrent of lonesomeness and pain.

Laura had really gone. She was with great-aunt Mary, beginning at the academy and learning to play on Arabella's piano, and very homesick, Thyrza thought it probable, very despondent over the value of what she was learning at such pains, yet treading her appointed path with dutiful little feet, as Laura would. Thyrza missed her in a sickening way that she defined to herself, having no other measure of comparison, as "like death." There was a lump in her throat and the whole earth looked to her like a dwelling-place for homesickness and pain. Her mother, too, she knew, was suffering for Laura, though she invested Mrs. Tennant with her own temperament, and gave it credit for an intensity of wretchedness it had never known. Mrs. Tennant had taken on an unwholesome yellow. She looked older, and the triangular frown on her forehead had run into a snarl of lines; but Thyrza saw in these outward changes the tokens of midnight vigils, of sobs and rending anguish that could by no means have sprung from that nature unless Mrs. Tennant had, in her own words, "gone ravin' distracted."

Thyrza felt that she had two tasks: she must study night and day, in pursuit of the intellectual life, and she must be a comfort to her mother. Sometimes Mrs. Tennant accepted her ministrations with a patient tolerance. Often she had to put them by. Thyrza had heard of little girls who were a solace because they read the Scriptures to their elders; and often when her mother was buttonholing, with the twist of the

hand that seemed at once so experienced and so brilliant, she brought out the picture Bible from the parlor and devotedly read a chapter. Mrs. Tennant fidgeted. It was impossible to let the sacred stream roll on unheeded, yet it did distract her from her task. Thyrza knew, too, that a word in season has an uplifting effect upon older guardians, and she fell into a way of appearing before her mother when the superciliary knot of worries tightened in Mrs. Tennant's forehead, and adjuring her to "hope on hope ever," or assuring her that it is likely to be "darkest just before the day." Sometimes Mrs. Tennant, at such an onslaught, regarded her with a mildly hopeless look; but again, and valuing the child's wayward sympathy for what it was worth, she would return in her own language, "That 's a good girl." Thyrza knew this was the highest praise.

Terry Updike came. Thyrza was walking home from the Corners, where she had been for groceries, when she heard behind her the plodding tread of Judge Gorse's Dill. She wished she had stepped over the wall and hidden behind the barberry bushes before ever this had happened to her. It was not because she was ashamed of carrying parcels, but she knew she must look funny with three tucked under her arm and the big bag of sugar in her hands. Barton would be sure to ask her to ride, and she would have to look up and answer in the face of an author home from England, and it would be agony. It all happened as she had guessed. Barton, driving the old chaise, had

pulled up and said, with the scrupulous courtesy he always used to her, —

"Let us take you home, Thyrza."

Thyrza stood there by the roadside, flushed by her shyness and her walk, and looking almost pretty, though in her own miserable conception she was only what her mother would have called numb.

"No, thank you, sir," she said, in a shy little voice. "I 'm not going very far."

That seemed to her, as soon as she had ventured it, the most hideously ridiculous thing possible to have said, because Barton knew exactly how far she was going. It was a country formula of refusal, but oh, how foolish to have used it here! Barton was answering gravely, —

"Then let us take your parcels. This is Miss Thyrza Tennant, uncle. Thyrza, this is my uncle Terry."

Thyrza was passing the bundles into the chaise as the easiest way of parting with them both, and there seemed to be no way, in courtesy, but to look up when she answered Terry Updike's "How do you do?" with her shy, "Pretty well, I thank you, sir." Terry Updike was looking straight at her with a keenness grown out of his desire to know everything that could enlighten him about Barton's frame of mind or his probable future. Thyrza was a little girl. Still, she was a girl, and he had to classify her in relation to his nephew. Thyrza met the glance. She stayed poised a moment, as if it held her, while her

own pupils grew black and the red surged into her cheeks.

Terry Updike was a handsome man of a foreign type. He wore a long mustache and imperial in the day when imperials were no more save with the unfashionable or the daring, and he had eyes of a liquid meaning. He was taking off his soft hat with a swift movement full of chivalry and grace, and Thyrza's heart responded with a great leap toward him and all the passionate romance of knights and lovers. The old horse jogged on, and she was left alone by the roadside, a maid come into her dowry of a dream. She walked home in an ecstasy. It was not long since she had read "Jane Eyre," and Terry Updike seemed to be sitting in a garden with her in a perpetual dusk, with the moth hovering over the flower and the lightning playing from the clouds. She was asking him if she suited him, and he was answering, "To the finest fibre of my being." She had not heard his voice, except in this waking dream, but it was deep, she knew, and full of passion. That was a beautiful word, Thyrza thought. Once she asked Barton Gorse what he thought it meant, and he answered: "Oh, warm emotion! It 's a word for poetry."

When she got home, her mother was sewing by the window and the parcels lay on the kitchen table. Thyrza walked through the room without speaking, and in her dream laid her hand gently upon one of the parcels. His hand, she knew, might have touched it. Her mother looked up briefly.

"That 's the sugar," she said. "You can empt' it if you want. Who 's that with Barton Gorse? Looked like an elderly man."

Thyrza turned in sudden suspicion. It seemed as if her mother almost meant to wound her.

"It 's Mr. Terry Updike," she said chokingly.

A swift tremor ran over her at saying his name at all.

"Oh!" returned her mother, unreeling a needleful of thread. "Well, he is a kind of an elderly man. He ain't been here for nigh onto twenty years, I guess."

Thyrza walked away into the kitchen garden. There was a breach she knew between her and her mother. "An elderly man," her indignant mind kept repeating; but caught by its reminiscent sound, memory tossed her another term she had fallen upon in her reading,—"a knight of eld." She repeated it in an ecstasy: "a knight of eld." The dahlias were blooming hard in the garden, a sturdy row all along by the old gray fence. She had been saving one, a deep red with petals perfectly quilled, to carry the minister's wife, whose dahlias were all straw-color and a miserable pink; but now she snapped the stem and set the flower in the neck of her brown dress. In a moment, she did not know why, she had unbraided her thick black hair and let it sweep about her face, and taken the narrow velvet from her neck to snood it. She tucked the dahlia into the snood and stood there looking at the yellowing sky and repeating to

herself, "a knight of eld." A wind had risen, and she went through the orchard and into the pasture to run in the face of it and let it sweep back her hair. She could almost feel that Terry Updike saw her, as she fled, and found her beautiful. The sun went down, and she ran in, the sun and wind in her face and the dahlia still in her tangled locks.

Her mother was making biscuits, and there was a warm odor of apple-sauce through the house. Mrs. Tennant looked up with one of her casual glances, and stayed her hand.

"For mercy sake!" said she. "Do go up chamber an' comb your hair. It looks like a hurrah's nest."

Thyrza went up with the impetus of her new possession still upon her; but as she passed aunt Ellie, sitting by the fire with a book held wisely in her lap, the little creature put out her hand and whimpered until Thyrza stayed beside her. Aunt Ellie lifted the hand higher, to stroke the dahlia petals.

"Pretty!" she chanted. "Nice pretty!"

Thyrza, in her chamber, braided her hair scornfully and with a cold patience appropriate to one who was living out a story. Her mother had bade her do it, she thought, and it was her destiny to yield; but she laid the dahlia in a drawer between her two best hair-ribbons, to fade and dry, and remind her perpetually of to-day.

Thyrza kept a diary at this time in an old writing-book Andy McAdam had "hove away," as he said, because he had no understanding of the letter "q,"

and his first assault upon it had been hooted at so vociferously by the boy who sat with him and who made skillful reproductions of it on the board at noon, to the joy of his comrades, and their downfall when Andy settled that score. She was accustomed to write a few lines in it just before going to bed, putting down the number of verses she had learned, or, in these prouder days, the lines of Virgil. But now, though she knew it was the moment for setting the table and that her mother would expect that dutiful aid, she flew to the window and in the last light put down in her diary, "He has come. A knight of eld. Dahlias." Then she ran into her mother's room and took down the old broken-pointed scissors that were always hanging over the string basket, and, in a passionate haste, cut off a tress of her long hair. She tied it with a bit of the narrow velvet she was wearing that moment when he had begun to love her, and shut it into the diary. It seemed to her that something irrevocable had been accomplished. She felt in some way which it was unnecessary to understand, as if they had spoken their troth, and that although the lock of hair was in her book, it was also in his keeping.

She went down to supper with a staid and dignified air. It was apparent to her that, now she was plighted to one of his great gifts and incomparable beauty, she could never stoop to childish actions. She was a grown-up lady, and it was at this time that she began to wonder whether she was not a changeling, and whether her mother was really her mother and not perhaps a

nurse with whom she had been left while her real mother went abroad, to be drowned on the way. She washed the dishes with a silent dignity because it seemed to her all duties must be fulfilled, and then seated herself by the lamp with "Endymion."

"Shall I read to you?" she asked politely. How could she add, "mother"? How did she know this was her mother, and not that lowly, faithful thrall? Mrs. Tennant glanced at the book and saw that the lines were of one length and that it had no pictures.

"If you'd like to," she said sighfully.

Thyrza began, but her mind was ever on the proud conception of herself as a changeling and her mother as the faithful nurse. At that moment of high decisions and great challenges, she wondered if the truth would not be best. What if she should lay down the book, transfix her mother with a glance, and invite her to tell all? She could assure her, "I shall never forsake you. I shall love you just the same." These wonderments kept on in a whirling race while she read Keats, and her mother sewed and considered whether she should get enough apples to dry. It was very quiet in the dusky kitchen, with only the little bright lamp to shed its circle of power. The clock struck eight. About this time, she knew, Laura used to stumble up from the lounge where she was always helpless under preliminary naps, and with the cat tucked under her chin, struggle round the room on drowsy errands, trying to wake herself before the inevitable going upstairs. There was the cat, a lonesome round island

of fur, still on the lounge; but Laura was pursuing the aims she did not see under the rod of great-aunt Mary. Thyrza ceased hearing the lovely lines, save as a monotonous drone set her to complete. She tried to blink her eyes open, and fixed them on her mother. There she sat, the worried snarl in her forehead, pulling the thread in and out. It looked as if she had sat there ever since Thyrza could remember anything; for she wore the kind of dress she had always worn, and her veined hands had the same knuckly look. She was the most familiar thing in the world.

The book Thyrza was reading belonged to Barton Gorse. In pursuance of her custom of being careful, she had wrapped it in a clean old handkerchief, and where her thumb held it open in the properest fashion was a scrap of paper to protect the page. Thyrza, in her daze of sleep and loneliness, forgot how precious it was. She closed it recklessly, and it slid downward to the floor.

"The land!" cried Mrs. Tennant, startled into life. "I believe I 'most lost myself."

Thyrza was on her knees, her head in her mother's lap.

"O mother," she was sobbing, "don't you die, will you? Promise me you won't die." It seemed to her as if nothing less than the destruction of this dear and homely creature was enough to punish her traitorous denial.

Mrs. Tennant dropped her coarse sewing beside the wet cheek, where it felt rough and yet divinely wel-

come because it was familiar. She laid a hand on Thyrza's hair and smoothed it with the awkwardness of one who has no habit of caresses.

"There!" she said, "I guess you better go right up to bed. I guess you 've got a kind of a cold, runnin' in the wind so."

Thyrza did go up to bed, her face swollen with tears and the cat over her shoulder as one small alleviation. She put the cat on her counterpane and then went to turn down her mother's coverlet, and kiss the pillow and the substantial unbleached nightgown with a penitential fervor.

II

That night Barton and his uncle sat late beside the library hearth. Terry Updike, from the indoor habit of his secluded life, had a shivering delicacy that called for fire, the look and feel of it. He piled on wood until Barton had to retreat from the outpouring warmth, and only then relaxed and stretched out his legs in a perfect ease. Barton was willing to be hot or cold as his uncle chose. He had been pathetically lonely at times in Leafy Road, and now he felt as if things were happening. Updike, out of his relaxed mood, suddenly turned on him a probing glance.

"Going back with me?" he asked.

Barton started.

"Back?" he echoed. "Back where?"

"To England, France, wherever you want, within reason. I've come to carry you off."

Barton sank back into his chair. He shook his head, smiling a little ruefully, with an air of knowing reasons.

"No," he said, "I stay right here."

His uncle turned on him a fuller look, one that lingered and studied.

"What do you mean, boy?" he asked kindly. "What are you settling down here for, at twenty-three? You 're squandering your best years."

Barton made a quick movement of dissent, and then forbade himself to answer.

"Why?" repeated Updike. "Why?"

"I'm not idle," said Barton, rather irritably. "I study."

"What?"

"Latin, mathematics. I 'm rubbing up my Greek."

"What for?"

Barton turned uneasily, to let the firelight play on his ear.

"Oh, I don't half know. How should I know? Yes, I do, in a way. I'm tutoring a little girl, and that got me into it. Now I rather like it."

Updike answered reflectively, in a musing conclusiveness of tone, —

"The little girl in spotted print, carrying the bundles."

"Yes."

"She 's not a very little girl."

"No, but she's young — not over fifteen, I fancy."

"What are you doing it for, Bart?"

Barton paused for a long interval. Then he broke out,—

"Because she wants it so infernally. I never saw anybody want anything in the world so much."

"Is she very clever?"

"Wonderfully. I try not to let her see how much cleverer she is than I am."

"Horrible child! How does she use her gifts?"

"Well, for an instance, we began Latin together this fall—"

"You did n't begin?"

"No, I 'd had it before. I began reviewing laboriously, keeping ahead of her. Now she reads Virgil like a shot, and I 'm still trying to keep ahead. And I can't, uncle, I simply can't. She 's no idea how I 'm tottering to my fall when she 's prancing along with her subjunctives and ablative absolutes. If she should ever ask me a question, I should double up under the table. That she does n't know."

"The little devil!" said Updike meditatively. Then he took out his cigar and held it between two fingers while he continued, still in that keen yet musing way, "You wanted to go to West Point, did n't you?"

Barton twisted in his chair. He had flushed uneasily.

"How did you know?" he parried.

"You told me, long ago—long, long ago, in a letter. Then I heard no more about it. I supposed gramp was boosting you, and presently gramp had died, and

I woke up and realized you had n't gone to West Point. Why did n't you, Bart?"

Barton rose and walked to the window, where as he approached he saw the semblance of another firelit room and his uncle looking quietly his way. But his moving figure blotted out the picture from the pane, and he was gazing into an impenetrable night. His uncle had asked the question again, and he answered from his covert, his back still turned upon the room.

"They would n't have me."

"Why?" The tone of that question was quieter even, but in the same measure more insistent.

"There 's something the matter with me."

"What is it?"

"It 's my heart."

Updike's lips formed a round of assent and understanding. Then they closed again upon the cigar. He smoked, and the young man looked out into the night.

"The alternative, then," said the older man, "would be something sedentary, perhaps. If you can't go for a sojer, why, you can do scores of things."

"No, I thank you."

"You have n't given up the ship?"

All this was what Barton had not mentioned to a soul. Strange things had happened to his endurance before he was given that verdict on his bodily state, but he had not spoken of them. Then, having the verdict and knowing at last why the things had happened, still he did not speak. His grandfather had gone out of the world unmoved in the harsh judgment that

the boy had no ambition, and Barton, knowing that, had merely been able to curl the leaves of his seclusion more imperatively about him and wrap himself in the solitude which seemed to him the only possible condition for a crippled youth. His uncle was speaking.

"Does Helen know?"

"Helen? She's got troubles of her own."

"Is that fellow hanging round her still?"

Barton's eyes filled with angry tears. He nodded.

"Where is she?" Updike asked.

"With her old governess in Canada. He's there."

"And his wife?"

"No. I believe not. It's not so bad as that."

"You ought to be with her."

Barton looked at him in a quick scorn.

"She won't have me. Do you suppose I should be here if she would? She thinks I don't understand. Helen's an angel."

"Barton," said Updike, with a delightful wheedling of a sort that made it intolerable to refuse him, "come over to England with me. I can find lots of uses for you." He had meant to stretch persuasion to its limit and say, "I need you"; but it wasn't true, and he could not manage it. Indeed, it was so vastly untrue that, as he remembered at this minute, he was only here now because, in the midst of his perfectly ordered and absolutely satisfying life over there the problematic case of this lone nephew had reached him like a little cry.

Barton came back to his seat. He was pale, and his

eyes had a suffused look, almost as if they had bred tears. He sat down, and with his arms hanging over the side of the chair, a lax and miserable figure that, having once renounced pride, saw no reason for any show of it, spoke with a pale decision.

"I can't fight it out. There 's nothing to fight out, that 's all. I'm no more equipped than any other cripple. It amuses me to live along here and teach my little girl. When she knows as much as I do — that'll be in a very few minutes — well, then I can see what I'll do next to take up the time."

Updike had a charming smile. It often helped him to kindly domination.

"Let 's send her away to school," he said, with a fascinating readiness.

Barton stared.

"Thyrza?"

"Is that her name? Yes, the little hop-pole in the brown frock. Send her to school, Bart. I'll pay for her."

Barton looked at him with incredulous eyes.

"By George!" he breathed. "Would you?"

"I'd promise it for a year. Perhaps I'd do more. Is there anything she'd rather have?"

Barton broke into a laugh.

"To protect me from her arts? that infant of fifteen?" His uncle was looking at him with a kindly middle-aged smile.

"Well," he continued, "what is there she'd rather have?"

"Why," said Barton, watching him with the lifted eyebrow of quizzical consideration, "I almost think she'd rather have a piano."

"Brava! a piano it is then. One condition only. You are to leave here with me in a week's time. Done?"

Barton began flushing and continued to the point of a deep red.

"It's a fact, is n't it? You want to get me out of her way — that little girl. Don't be an idiot."

Updike was smoking meditatively, looking into the fire.

"Oh, let her have her piano, if she wants it. It'll be better for her and better for you. It's funny for you to have a young girl here every day reading Virgil. Her mother does n't come with her, I take it?"

"Her mother!" Barton laughed again, satirically. He had a vision of Mrs. Tennant as he had seen her, upon the swiftest of flights along interminable seams. "We don't do things that way here. Why, you remember what it is to live in America, in the country. Don't be an ass."

Updike quite approved of him for forgetting their ill-matched ages.

"Well," he said, tolerant of it all, country customs, little learned maidens and stubborn nephews, "you present the case to her to-morrow when she comes for her lesson. Tell her an imaginary personage will give her the desire of her heart. Only you know it means you come away with me. It means that." Then he cleverly turned the talk to other things, and Bar-

ton found himself unable to recur to qualifying rebuttals.

Thyrza did not go for her lesson next day. She was in bed with a cold acquired by running against the wind with beflowered locks. The cold was not bad enough to keep her in bed, but she elected to stay there, to escape the possibility of going for her lesson or being sought to be asked why she was delinquent. It was impossible to go, she knew quite definitely, because Terry Updike was there and she loved him. Her love stood between them. Never could she approach him, never take a step toward him or raise her eyes to his, because he was the one love of her life, and for some reason this must be so. She asked herself no questions on the subject of love and its usages. She did not try to compare her passion with any other, but only recognized the new state of being. It was an exaltation all unlike the uplifting of sacrifice which had before been her top notch of feeling. Now she was shut away into a particular world, with him only, the sacred, wonderful, dreadful image of him, never to come out any more, she knew.

Of his part of their mutual tie she did not think. He seemed indissolubly connected with her, and it could not be that he loved her, poor Cinderella as she was. Yet somehow she felt he did. The beautiful rhythmic steps of her own devotion were not taken alone. Surely she heard other steps falling in with them. There must be two, she was certain, dancing, singing, side by side. So she lay in her bed and

wrote little thoughts in her diary, things that meant something to her but would signify nothing if the book were found, and looked at her slim brown hands with the pretty nails and wished they were beautiful. Her mother kept coming upstairs at first, frowning at her strange state and dropping a kindly touch on her wrist.

"Seems as if you was a mite feverish," she said. "But you don't have no cold to speak of."

"I want to move my bed to the window," declared Thyrza, the fever in her hurried voice. "I want to see the road."

"You better by half get up an' come down to supper," urged Mrs. Tennant. "Mother'll open a tumbler o' jelly."

But she could not go. She sprang up, and with a passionate strength helped pull her bed about, and there she lay looking out of the window, wondering what she could do if he did go by.

One day, Barton walked up the road and stopped at the door to ask why she had not come for lessons. He was so sorry, her mother came to tell her. He would call again the next day. She watched him walking back home at a swinging pace. It seemed incredible that he was going to see Terry Updike, to talk with him, sit at the table with him, say good-night.

Next day, when the sun was pale on yellow leaves and crows were cawing at a distance, Barton came again, and when she in her timid obstinacy refused

to see him, sent up word, with the authority of the preceptor, that she must. Her mother, wholly dazed by all the atmospheric changes, helped her put on her clothes, and at the end gave her a little encouraging yet half-exasperated push toward the stairway. It was a pale, miserable little maiden, all excitement, that entered the room where Barton waited for her. He had few words to spend on her illness. Barton was playing a little game with himself. If Thyrza snatched at the piano, he would take it as a sign that he was to go away with his uncle to France, to England.

"Get your hat," he said at once. "Come out and walk. I want to tell you something."

Thyrza hated her old brown hat with the draggled feather too often curled over the kitchen lamp. She went out bareheaded, and he followed. When they were under the maples, in that yellowing drift of leaves, he spoke, striking at the ground as he talked, with a stick newly, she was sure, in his possession. At once she felt it belonged to Terry Updike. It seemed a remarkable stick.

"Thyrza," said Barton, "what do you suppose my uncle means to do?"

She felt her teeth chattering on the words.

"I don't know."

"He wants to give you a piano."

She stopped and trembled, looking off into the road vista, framed now by thinning boughs. It did not come to her to ask why. It only seemed a most

solemn thing that Terry Updike should have had that wish.

"He is going back to England," said Barton. He was watching her curiously, realizing that even he had not yet known how intensely she could feel. "He wants to take me with him, and he wants to give you a piano. I told him how you liked to study and how you wanted a piano. He 's going to give it to you."

Thyrza had not moved. Now her mouth trembled a little, and he saw a tear roll down her cheek.

"I can't let him," she said.

Barton roused himself.

"You 'll be an idiot. Come, Thyrza. He 's a good old chap. Don't you know how old he is?"

Thyrza scarcely heard him. She knew she could not explain, but it had become at once evident to her that because she loved Terry Updike she could not take the piano. She turned to Barton, her solemn tear-wet eyes fixed on his.

"I thank him ever so much," she said, "but I can't take it. You tell him I can't take it."

Barton laughed aloud. The burden of his own decision rolled from him at her words.

"You won't take the piano," he said. "Well, Thyrza—" The sunset light was on her face and it suddenly came to him that she had a kind of beauty. "Well, Thyrza, I won't go abroad either. We 'll sink or swim together."

He put out his hand. Thyrza was looking at him with a piteous face. She had but one thought.

"What time is he going?"

"On the early train. I shall run up to town with him. We can't have any lessons to-morrow." He was still regarding her with his kindly quirk of the mouth that was not quite a smile, wondering whether, after all, she cared as much about her piano as he had thought. He put it crudely,—"I guess you like books better than pianos anyway, don't you, Thyrza?"

Her chin quivered a little. No one, she knew, would understand, except the Knight of Eld himself, and if they were never to meet again, she could not tell him.

"I guess so," she said faintly.

The next morning she was at her window, kneeling there half-hidden by the curtain. She had dressed very carefully, because she knew this hour of his going was one she should never forget. She had wound her hair round the top of her head in a coronet, like a picture in the fashion magazines "up attic," and had pinned the front of her dress with her mother's cameo pin. At exactly the time she had expected, she heard the slow plodding of hoofs upon the road. There they were, crowded into the chaise, Barton and his uncle, and Michael driving them. Terry Updike was on her side, and she saw again the fine sweep of the profile, the square shoulders, the large soft hat that seemed to need only a feather to make him a prince in the eyes of every one as he was in hers. She crouched behind the curtain lest, by some chance, he should look up. But his face was set forward, sternly, she thought. The Knight of Eld was gone.

V

THE LETTERS

When Andy McAdam was nineteen years old, he ran away. The immediate cause of his flight was that his grandmother, then something over seventy, intimated that it was time to sow the peas; but the real reason was that Andy felt spring fever in his blood and blindly wanted to be gone. There was nothing in Leafy Road to absorb a creature like him, half-gypsy and all a rioting youth and health. He had been sobered with the logical effect of turning deeply sulky when Laura Tennant went away to live with her great-aunt Mary Hubbard and be educated. Andy would have fallen upon the boy that should accuse him of playing with girls; but Laura was his chum, sought out at shy moments for hidden confidences about his future riches and power and hypothetical experiences with firearms. Thyrza he bore with when he must, because she was Laura's sister; but she was always talking about things you did n't understand, and being hurt or proud when you did n't know you 'd spoken to her.

That morning when he ran away, the blackbirds were deep in their jarring chorus, and there was a smell of damp earth and new leaves. Andy rose from the breakfast table and stretched himself. He was a strange fellow for plodding country ways, very active and yet lazy, a handsome creature, too, with great

height and strong shoulders, and health visible in his reddish hair and ruddy skin. His grandmother, a slender old lady, very straight yet with a peculiar way of carrying her head now, because her glasses never seemed to fit and she had to peer round something to see at all, looked up and trembled a little. She was not afraid of Andy, but she knew how he would hate what she had to say. Andy liked her very much, though he was often exasperated because her frailty stood continually in his path. It seemed to him sometimes as if she made herself older than she need, to excite his compassion and so hinder him further. She clung to an inherited type of clothes that even ancient ladies in Leafy Road wore no more, strange bonnets and figured veils, and caps with bulbous rosettes of satin ribbon, when she "went abroad" to call, and antique little shoulder-shawls on even a warm day. Andy felt as if she were playing the game of age and youth with him, and as if, whenever the thought of the sea and a pushing wind came upon him, or railroads, and he in a flying engine bending forward, his hand on the throttle, one of her pathetic little shawls waved before him, a signal to pause. He had a theory that he might have made something, but that his grandmother's caps and shawls prevented.

She looked at him with the little cant of her head that was moving to him and made him angry because he had to heed it.

"I guess other folks' early peas are all in by now," she said.

Andy growled. He had gone into the shed to look at his gun, as it sat there in the corner, and wonder if he wanted to go and shoot at a mark.

"Thyrza Tennant put theirn in herself," said his grandmother, still watching him with that poise of her head. "She's a terrible smart girl."

Andy growled again and thought how handsome and smooth Laura had looked in her placid beauty, the last time she came home to visit. Mrs. McAdam seemed to read his mind in a way she had. They were together every day, and she thought of Andy all the time.

"I guess," she said, not maliciously, but with a simple candor, "Laura never'll be back here to live, now."

Andy ceased looking at his gun, and stared out at the chopping-block in the shed. He was thinking of Laura, with a rebellious bitterness, and yet realizing also that it would be only a few hours before he should be asked to split kindlings on that chopping-block, when all the world was calling him to blue waters and long roads. His grandmother had begun one of her vexatious ramblings wherein she told what they both knew equally.

"You see Laura got kinder ketched there. Her aunt took an' educated her an' all, an' then when her aunt was bed-rid, of course Laura had to stay an' take care of her. Mebbe Thyrza's got some peas left over. She's gone to school now, ain't she? Mebbe I could see her when she comes home at noon."

Andy set down his gun and, willfully silent, walked

out of the house. His grandmother rose and peered after him, though she could not see him. She listened a moment, to hear whether he went whistling, but there was not a sound.

Thyrza was teaching the district school, and when she came rustling home in her starched dimity, walking with head erect as she always did because that seemed to her the way to walk, Mrs. McAdam called to her from the door.

"You ain't seen Andy round the neighborhood, I s'pose? I be'n waitin' for him to split me some kindlin'."

"No," said Thyrza. She had a clear, sweet, rather masterful voice. "You wait, Mrs. McAdam; I'll pick you up some chips." She leaned her parasol against the front fence, and came hurrying up the walk.

Mrs. McAdam had great respect for Thyrza because she spoke so prettily and was smart as a trap.

"Don't you do no such thing," she adjured her. "I can manage to scrape some together. Like's not he's gone fishin', an' won't be home till night."

But Thyrza deftly picked up the chips and then "blazed" the fire herself. When she got home where her mother had their dinner of greens and boiled potatoes waiting, she said, with a dignified displeasure, —

"I should think Andy 'd be ashamed to make his grandmother run round after him all the time, splitting kindling and things."

"Well," said her mother tolerantly, "Andy's young.

He never was cut out for a farmer. He 's a kind of a wanderin' spirit."

"I 'm going to speak to him about it," said Thyrza. But she did not speak to him because Andy failed to come home. The spring went on and summer passed, and there was never a word from him. At first his grandmother bemoaned herself bitterly that she had asked him to sow the peas, because that, she always believed, had been the just cause of his going. Andy, in her fond mind, developed into a hero who should never have been set to common tasks. Then, when her eyes troubled her the more, and it was an effort to lament, she withdrew into a hurt silence, and became a very old woman before her time. She dated all her misfortunes from the hour of Andy's flight.

"Ain't it hard?" she would say to Thyrza, over and over again, "ain't it kinder hard I didn't know no better than to drive him off, when he 's as good a boy as ever stepped? A dear good boy, Andy was, a dear good boy."

Thyrza did not think he was a dear good boy. She had passionate angers in her which seemed all justice, and she knew that if she ever saw Andy McAdam again she should give him a piece of her mind. But her heart ached too, in anger, she thought, though it seemed strangely accordant with grandmother McAdam's pain of loss, for she understood that very well. But whether out of compassion or a fierce loyalty to the wandering youth, she assumed the care of the old lady in a way that made Mrs. McAdam

cling to her pathetically, and awakened the neighbors, also, to a wondering service. It was a kindly place, but when illness had stricken one of its children and the rest had thronged about with help, they forgot, after a time, and turned back to their own vocations. But Thyrza never forgot. She was a vital creature, full of life and will, and born to a passionate giving like the fruit that drops, in a large radius, from a spreading tree.

Soon after Andy had gone, Laura came home for a visit. She had grown into a tall, rich-looking creature, with an abundance of brown hair and a warm skin; she had, too, an unfailing air of gentle kindliness. Thyrza, beside her, looked like a thin race-horse all fire and speed, ready to run till she dropped; but Thyrza had not that other potent and most homely charm. Thyrza might rush to the aid of a struggling world, but Laura went about shedding honey from her breath.

When Laura was told that Andy had run away, she paled a little under the bloom of her cheek, and answered with a look of tacit inquiry.

"Yes," said Thyrza, "I 've wondered myself. Mrs. McAdam never seems to think of that. Of course something 's happened to him."

"Oh, no," said Laura, "that was n't what I meant. I was only trying to think what had become of him. Oh, no, nothing 's happened to Andy!"

"Why, how do you know?" asked Thyrza, wondering.

"Because there has n't. He 's just run away, that 's all."

"What made him run away?"

"He just felt like it," said Laura. "That 's all."

Thyrza had again that sense she had been conscious of ever since their childhood, that Laura understood all about Andy, in a definite fashion, even though she might never be able to explain him to any one else.

In a few days Laura went away again to her dull task of nursing great-aunt Mary, whose legs, to the horror of the townspeople, who thought she must have incurred celestial wrath to have contracted a disease of such eccentricity, seemed turning to marble; and Mrs. Tennant, after watching her along the road with the patient longing she felt all the time now, like an inward misery, returned to her sewing, with a sigh.

Thyrza went on with her studying by night and all her passionate service. She did not question where her study would lead her. When the neighbors began to wonder why, after three years of lessons with Barton Gorse, she should continue carrying heavy books to and from the schoolhouse, to utilize even the time from twelve to one, when she stayed at noon on a wet day, she could give them no enlightenment.

"What you goin' to do with all you know?" they asked her, at times.

But Thyrza, who privately thought she had accumulated a good stock of data, was merely conscious that some time there would be a glorious event, and for that she was resolved to be prepared. When Barton

Gorse went away to his uncle Terry, still in Europe and summoning his nephew in irritated letters as of one who was hindered from doing a duty by the obstinacy of the recipient, she felt bereft. He was like a guardian, the verdict of the world she did not know, on all her deeds and wonderings. "Write to me," he had said, and she had eagerly assented. But it proved, on trial, that she could not write. Nothing happened to her save that she began teaching the district school, and kept on teaching it. She became aware then that her inward life was all the life she lived, and this she had been in the habit of presenting to Barton Gorse in an innocent betrayal. But the things that seemed quite natural to say when you were walking with your teacher, or when you could look up from Virgil and ask about them, or even when you thought of them in the night and saved them to talk about the next day, would seem very silly set down in a letter. Besides, Barton would be with his uncle Terry, who was an author, and who might graciously read a line or two out of a letter from home; and nothing she had to say could stand so high a test. Terry Updike was a wonderful figure to her. For months after his visit in Leafy Road, she had thought of him with a single-minded worship. He was the unconscious arbiter of all her actions, and her exquisite daily life, all truth and cleanness, as she tried to make it, was a page that she dared not think could ever be referred to him, but that must be worthy of his eye.

One day she carried a mince pie to Mrs. McAdam, who found large solace in rich food. Thyrza knew a great deal about hygienic theory and practiced it with a scorn of succulent delights; but she could not quite resist that look of eager pleasure on a pinched old face, and kept her ancient friend abundantly supplied with "sweet trade."

To-day she found Mrs. McAdam smaller, more contracted than ever into the sphere of her poverty and blindness. She sat by the window in the pale afternoon sun, the corners of her mouth dropped, as if she were a crying child. She looked up with a quivering readiness when Thyrza opened the door.

"Thyrza," said she, "did you know my sight's failin' me?"

"Yes," said Thyrza, "I knew it. There, Mrs. McAdam, I've brought you a saucer pie."

"I won't cut it till supper-time," said the old lady. "Thyrza, don't it seem to you, now my sight's failin' me, as if Andy might write me a line or two?"

Indignant comment rose to Thyrza's lips, but she turned it into soothing.

"He'll write, Mrs. McAdam. Andy'll write when he gets round to it."

But when she had talked over the neighborhood news, and laid the fire for supper, she walked home thoughtfully and up into her chamber, there to perch on the bed, her chin in her hand, and think again. She was not sure that she was going to do right, but she was clearly convinced that something must be done.

That night she stayed in her room writing, while her mother sewed below, and next morning she ran over to the post-office and then back to Mrs. McAdam's. There was a thick envelope in her hand. She burst in on her old friend, now occupied with the painstaking task of clearing up after breakfast. Thyrza dared not wait for greetings, lest her purpose fail.

"Only think!" she cried. "I've been to the post-office and I've brought you a letter."

Mrs. McAdam laid down her dish towel and stood still at the table, supporting herself by one trembling hand.

"Who's it from?" she asked weakly. "Open it, dear, open it. Who's it from?"

Thyrza tore it open in a desperate haste. Her eyes were bright with a kind of moral terror.

"It's signed," she said, in a clear voice, "'Yours with love, Andy McAdam.'"

Mrs. McAdam turned away from her and walked over to her own particular chair by the window. There she sat down.

"Well," she whispered, "what's he say?"

It was a remarkable letter. Andy was well, but not happy, because he wanted to see his grandmother so much. Yet he was getting on, and he hoped in time to have something in the bank, and then he meant either to send her money regularly or to come home to live with her. He loved her dearly. She had been the best friend to him that ever a boy had, and the time would

come when he would prove it. This was a particularly warm and outspoken letter for a tongue-tied youth like Andy, but his grandmother remembered the times, years ago, when he had come shamefacedly to her at twilight, just before he went to bed, and stretched himself at her feet, to put his head in her lap while she stroked his hair. Andy was like a dog in wanting his head rubbed, and now, when these warm words came in Thyrza's eager, throbbing voice, his grandmother seemed to feel again under her old fingers that thick, rough crop of red. But all she could say was,—

"You look over it ag'in, Thyrza, an' see if he don't say what he 's doin' of."

"No," said Thyrza, "he does n't say."

"You look at the postmark, dear."

"It's blotted," said Thyrza. Then catching the disappointment in the old face, she glanced again. "Oh," said she, "it 's a place in Missouri."

"You give it here," Mrs. McAdam bade her. "I'd kinder like to see 'f I can't make suthin of it."

Thyrza left her alone with her letter, and for this once it happened that her dreams were true. Grandmother McAdam loved her letter as passionately as the romantic heart could wish.

Thyrza was always imagining the most poetic things for everybody to do in any given place, and undismayed, when they failed to do them, imagining again. Once she had heard that Captain Frisbee was coming home from a voyage, and had instantly conceived the picture of his wife's meeting him at the steps and

throwing herself into his arms, perhaps with a joyous cry. But she had happened to be at the station to meet Laura the day Captain Frisbee came, and the captain's wife was there, too. Mrs. Frisbee was sitting out with the team, waiting, a large, important figure in a cashmere shawl, and Captain Frisbee had appeared bearing one end of his chest, while the station-master carried the other. He had cast an incidental glance at his wife, and, seeing her in unimpaired solidity, had remarked to the station-master, as they fitted in the trunk, "Cant her a leetle to the no'theast, Billy"; after which he took the reins from his wife's hand, jumped in, and said, in quite his usual tone, "Any errands, Mary?"

This was always happening. Thyrza was forever painting the picture in dazzling colors, and the world was as regularly toning it down. But grandmother McAdam would have satisfied her: for that night and for many nights after, indeed, until another letter came, she slept with her treasure under her pillow. By and by there were other letters, and all that winter they kept on coming. Andy told nothing but good news. It could not have been otherwise, for he was on the tip-top of prosperity and had only the best of news to tell. He gave no hope of returning, but grandmother understood that was only because of the delay of fortune. When he could leave with safety to his investments, she would see him home. The neighbors had had little idea of grandma's living through the winter; but under the impetus of joy she brightened wonderfully. She even said one day, —

"Thyrza, I 'most think my eyes are a mite clearer." Still she did not see any better. Perhaps it seemed to her that she could discern the picture of Andy's prosperous life.

One afternoon in the early spring, three years after Andy had gone away, Thyrza had read to her the most beautiful letter of all. It told how Andy had been settled for some months in a mining country, and how he hoped to come home with his pockets full of rocks. Thyrza, as she read these vulgar expressions, hated them, but they were exactly the phrases Andy had to use, and to grandma McAdam they brought almost his visible presence into the room. Then Thyrza laid down the sheet and looked up at the old woman nodding her delight over Andy's lips at her ear, telling his good fortune, and wondered if it would not be possible for grandma McAdam to be called away while she was so content. Thyrza had swift dramatic ways of disposing of people who were either in trouble or robbed of the robust and vivid joys of living. She found herself always pushing them off into another life where, the Bible told her, the crooked was made straight. There was no way out of it for grandma McAdam unless she died or Andy came home, and Andy was a wandering star and would never come home at all. And Thyrza, after saying good-night, went out of the shed-door in the gathering dusk, and met Andy face to face.

She retreated, and stood, her back against the door, defending it from him. A throb in her breast told her

how glad she was to see him. He had been a man when he went away, with full stature and strength. But though he could not have grown, he was more than that now. His frame had knit itself into something splendid in power and the promise of endurance. His face, the red of health in it, mixed with that sanguine color in a potency that seemed to deny the weakening of time, was lighted by his bold, compelling eyes, and his red-brown hair seemed to curl as if it had a separate life of its own, and every lock would live and move of its own vitality if it were shorn and scattered. The earth had given birth to a man in Andy, and the power and strength she had put into him were enough to drive him fast on any road and drag willing captives after him. He was regarding Thyrza with a smile of open-eyed approval.

"By George!" he said, "I did n't think you 'd turn into this kind of girl. You're as handsome as a picture. Gramma inside?"

Thyrza crimsoned to her hair. People had not been in the habit of telling her she was handsome as a picture, and when she looked in the glass with anxious scrutiny, her mother's own worried frown born suddenly in her brow, she sometimes wondered if she had any good looks at all. But save as an unconscious shock, to rouse dormant responses and be remembered afterwards, whatever he could say to her must have no effect on her now. She thought of grandma.

"Come out through the orchard," she said. "I 've got to see you first."

Andy's face sobered.

"She 's alive, ain't she?" he insisted.

A small wave of anger, not like the surge Thyrza expected to feel, touched her for a moment, at thinking he could be away three years and not know whether his grandmother was dead or not. But she could not fight that out. She was leading the way into the orchard and he was following, giving one glance at the road where a man and a young woman were driving by.

"Old Pelton! or I'll be shot!" said Andy. "He ain't changed a hair. That ain't Rosie May with him?"

"Yes," said Thyrza absently, after one glance at the plump figure and the nodding feathers, "that's Rosie May."

"Remember how you busted her play-house? If I've thought of that once in the last three years I've thought of it forty times."

They were facing each other now down under the sopsavine. The trees were in bloom, and beside the apple fragrance there was the elusive scent of spring. Thyrza felt the pleasure and the sharp ache of it all, — spring, twilight, the moment when youth, in its causeless melancholy, longs for death because it can imagine nothing else so great to long for, as if the change itself must be as poignant as the grief it brings. For no reason it came to her, in one wave of tragic pain, that it would be sweet to die with Andy under the apple-boughs, and know no more. Yet when she had these fleeting desires for death, it always seemed

to her as if her own curious spirit would be waking still, observing the earth and seeing how much people regretted her. But there was much to be said, and as the awkwardness of it came upon her, she knew Andy would laugh, and with unconscious cleverness made a stroke at him.

"I should like to know why you have n't written to your grandmother all this time."

Andy broke off an apple-bloom and, putting his head on one side to note the effect, held it against her cheek. He shook his head then and threw the bloom away.

"No good," he said, "you ain't pink. You 're red and brown. Why did n't I write? Why, 'cause I did n't, that 's all! After I 've been in the room five minutes, she never 'll know whether I wrote or not."

Andy had not had to live many years to find that out. He had the gift of pleasing, sometimes even without active effort or even speech. Thyrza felt suddenly, not like a righteous judge, but the foolish culprit brought unexpectedly to book.

"She wanted to hear from you dreadfully. She was so lonesome she 'most died."

"Sho!" said Andy, with a cordial interest. "Well, I 'll make it up to her. Say, Thyrza, I 've got money."

Thyrza looked at him, her lips parted, her eyes wide. She had never yet met anybody who made money save from the proceeds of selling a cow, and then another cow had to be bought in place of it, and the joy was fleeting. Andy smiled gloriously at her. This stunned surprise was what he hoped for.

"Yes," he said, "I've been west. First I went on the railroad. Then I got in with a feller that had a kind of a nose for such things, and we bought some land, and there was copper in it same as he said there 'd be. We sold out, and I need n't do another stroke of work, if I don't want to."

Thyrza was aghast with the fateful wonder of it.

"Why," said she, "I told her 't was a mine."

"Told who?"

"Your grandmother."

"How 'd you know?"

"Oh, I had to say something!"

"But you did n't know?"

"I wrote letters to her."

Andy stared.

"Wrote letters to her?" he repeated.

"Yes." It became more difficult with every word, and Thyrza, in her vain strength of mind, feared exceedingly to hear that derisive hoot of his. She hated, in a moral question like this, to be put in the wrong, and all winter she had known well that it was a moral question. She lifted her head, and, with a flushed cheek and kindling eye, essayed her own defense. "You did n't write to your grandmother, and she was alone and old, and 'most blind —"

Andy was listening curiously, but the one word caught and held him.

"Blind?" he echoed.

"Yes. The doctor says it 's cataract. She can't see hardly at all. So I wrote letters to her as if they were

from you, and I read them to her, and she was pleased."

Andy had kept on staring at her, but now Thyrza did not care whether he blamed her or not, or even whether her perfidy should be known, and perhaps grandma McAdam cease thinking she was such a starched-dimity miss and learn that she had been only a forger after all. Andy stood immovable. His imagination seemed unable to grapple with the case.

"You wrote letters and said they were from me?" He repeated it incredulously.

"Yes," said Thyrza, holding her head higher.

"Nice letters?"

"Nice as I could write."

"Tell her I was prosperin'? Give her my love and all that?"

"Yes."

Andy did not laugh. She stole a quick look at him and saw how his face had softened. Even the full, curved lips seemed trembling a little. He came a step nearer, and Thyrza, to whom it had not occurred that new things of that sort came with an assault, found she was in his arms.

"You're a trump, Thyrza," Andy was saying, in a moved voice close to her ear. "You're a trump, if ever there was one." Then his lips had touched her cheek softly and as she drew her head back with an impulse of wondering terror, he had kissed her on the mouth, and she had released herself, or he had let her go. She could not look at him now, but she

gazed past him, and her breath came sobbingly with the sense of escape and the knowledge of strange things. But it was wonderful that it had come so suddenly, for she guessed what it was. This was love; she had read about it, and she knew people often felt it quite suddenly for each other, and that was the sacredness of it, and the charm. It was as if Andy had come from far, bringing her a rich gift, and had not waited an hour or minute, but had poured it all at once into her lap. She turned and swiftly took the path across the orchard to the road.

"Thyrza!" he called.

She hesitated, knowing she could not look, but letting him overtake her, if he would. In an instant he was beside her; his hand was on her wrist.

"I'm goin' back to-night," he said, "back as far as New York. I'm there on business. But I shall come again."

He bent to kiss her, but for some reason she could not let him now, and his lips brushed her cheek. Then she broke away from him and walked toward home, while Andy strode in to tell grandma he was alive and the beautiful letters were all true.

Thyrza went softly in at the back way, not to call forth a question from her mother, and slipped upstairs to her own room. She knelt by her bed, and buried her burning face in the little white quilt. It had come, her heart told her, love and all the joy and pain. Something was gone, too, with the touch of those invading lips. Something had even vio-

lated the room where her maiden life had flamed on untouched and calm. There was a warm presence in it, a dominating will, a crude demandingness that almost burned her up with the heat of self-assertion. And it had all come so swiftly. Years ago she had decided, in her childish mind, that Andy and Laura would be married when they grew up. Their childish companionship needed only a shade more of intimacy to be called "going together." But in some strange way it had been decreed that Andy should bring the gift to her, and that, since it inspired her with a terror which was not denial, it must be her gift.

That night she dressed her dark hair in beautiful lustrous braids and made herself sweet in a scrupulous care that was like adorning for a bridal. Her mother looked at her and wondered.

"What you got on your cashmere for?" she asked, and Thyrza, in the exaltation that sustained her since her crowning, could not stoop to palter.

"Andy's come," she said simply, lifting her head in a sweet pride. Her lips took on a smiling curve. She hardly dared think of them and the chrism of that kiss lest her color should betray her.

Mrs. Tennant laid down her work.

"Andy McAdam!"

"Yes."

"Well!" said Mrs. Tennant, in a pregnant ejaculation. "How's he look?"

"I can't tell," said Thyrza, out of her dream.

"What's his grandmother say to him?"

"I didn't see them together. I met him at the door. We talked, and I came home."

Mrs. Tennant said no more about the cashmere dress. She was too full of small wonderments. Had Andy done well or ill? Had he come for good? Thyrza answered at random now, as she moved about, getting an early supper. She wanted to have it "out of the way" before Andy should appear. Then she supposed that according to the country custom they would talk a little with her mother, and Andy would perhaps ask her to go to walk, when he would tell her dear, intimate things such as lovers know, and they would part at the door and she would go upstairs to dream. Life would never be the same again.

But after the dishes were done and the kitchen looked as neat as wax, she ran hastily upstairs. A loyal rite must be accomplished before the bridegroom came. There was a pressed flower in a book, put there when she was a little girl, and a date and some words. Those must be destroyed that she might go to her lover with untarnished faith. When she came back with her sacrifice rolled in a piece of tissue paper, to escape her mother's eye, she found Mrs. Tennant had gone to the next neighbor's to tell the news of Andy's visit. So Thyrza did not have to go into the parlor to do her deed unseen. She laid the paper solemnly on the andirons in the sitting-room, and stood there while it blazed. Then she felt unblemished in her loyalty. Terry Updike should be as if he had never been, that Andy might be all in all.

She took a book and sat down by the window and waited for him, but it was impossible to read. Sometimes she thought her cheeks were too red and ran to look at them. But she was pale, and then it seemed to her he would not find her comely. In spite of what he had said that afternoon, Thyrza had grave doubts of her beauty. The dusk came, and she lighted the shining lamp and put it out again because it made the room too large and bright to sit in with her own thoughts, and no one to tell her they were natural and right, or to laugh, in that way Andy had, as if he half scorned things and was indifferent to them, and yet tender of them. Then it occurred to her that if the house were dark he might not come, and she lighted the lamp again.

At nine o'clock her mother hurried in, aglow with interest.

"Well," she said, "I've seen Andy."

"Where is he?" asked Thyrza coldly, because her throat hurt her and it was hard to speak aloud.

"Over to the Peltons'."

"You been over there?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Tennant, dropping her little shawl from her head to her shoulders and sitting down in the rocking-chair for a minute of swaying comfort before she went to bed. "I did n't want to poke in to gran'ma McAdam's, first night he was there, but I did feel as if I must know if anybody 'd seen him. Rosie May see him first thing. She said he was goin' out o' the shed-door with you."

"Yes." Thyrza looked at her mother compellingly. She wanted to cry out in her impatience, and declare it was nothing to her, what Rosie could say. "Where was Andy?"

"Well, of all things to happen! While we were settin' there in the dark who should come trampin' along the walk but Andy himself."

Thyrza got up and laid her book down on the table.

"What'd he want?" she asked, in a voice that sounded cold even to her own dull ears.

"Why, first thing, we thought he'd come to make a call. But no, he wanted Elmer to harness up an' take him over to the 'leven o'clock. Seems he had to ketch the train an' be in New York by daylight."

"In New York?" repeated Thyrza, without emotion.

"Yes, Andy's a great man o' business now. He'd got to meet somebody, an' I dunno what all. Well, I'll be gittin' along to bed." She rose and stretched herself, yawning.

Thyrza felt small and young again. She could have laid hold of her mother's skirts and begged her to stay, until they together should unravel this coil of woman's being. In spite of herself something sharp came into her voice and made it like a cry.

"That wasn't all he said, mother. What'd he say?"

Mrs. Tennant had wound the clock and given a comprehensive look at doors and windows.

"Yes," she decided, "that was about all, I guess. You see he only come to git Elmer to harness up.

He said good-by all round. Yes, he did ask for Laura. 'How's Laura, Mis' Tennant?' says he. 'How is she?' I told him she's with great-aunt Mary an' likely to be. I guess I was the last one he spoke to 'fore he went out. 'I shall come back,' he says. 'I'm comin' back.'"

Then Mrs. Tennant opened the chamber door and looked back inquiringly for Thyrza to follow. But Thyrza had brought a pile of books from the cupboard, and ranged them on the table.

"I think I'll sit up awhile," she said.

That was not unusual. Mrs. Tennant told the neighbors with pride that Thyrza sometimes studied till 'leven or twelve at night.

"Well," she returned, "you be careful o' the lamp." Then Thyrza heard her brisk footsteps on the floor above.

Thyrza did study awhile because she had said she would, and her rigid integrity forbade her to leave a word unfulfilled; but the stillness rang with voices, and presently she pushed her books away, went softly to the door and opened it. The night was clear and still. She knew where he was now, walking up and down at the little station, waiting for the train and thinking of what had come to pass. She put out her arms into the dark, pretending that his thoughts had wings and that she could compel them to her. Then she blushed and was ashamed; but drawn to him, forbidden to shut herself indoors before he had irrevocably gone, she stepped out and sat down on

the sill. This was where she and Laura had sat, years ago, to eat their bread and milk, and now she was on her way to love and marriage. The thought of Laura ran like a questioning note into this grave harmony. Laura, too, as well as Andy, kept calling to her, not complainingly but wonderingly. That made the night all the more vocal and strange. She was almost terribly alive, responsive to every tie that had ever held her.

And then, as she sat in her bright wonder at the fullness of life, the great wave that seemed sweeping in with the sun on its crest, there was a shriek of the train in the distance, and it went away with a diminishing roar, still like the sound of waves, and she knew Andy had gone. Once more she stretched out her arms toward him, and then rose to go in, happier perhaps than if he had come. She could not have borne the impetuous call of his warm willfulness. Now she had her dream to cherish, that and his promise. He would come back.

VI

TROY TAVERN

THE neighbors said that Thyrza Tennant was changed. She had been a kind of a thinnish wisp of a girl, but now she was as handsome a creatur' as ever stepped. They could not know that this was chiefly because Andy McAdam had kissed her and Thyrza had answered in a solemn troth-plight, and that, although Andy had neither come back nor written her a word, she walked in a rich and stately dream, and held herself remote from lesser things. She had usually, though without definite intention, kept aloof from her girl mates. They wanted to talk about beaux and singing-school, and Thyrza invited no less exalted converse than such as might, at any minute, ripple round to Emerson's Essays or the "Everlasting Yea" of Carlyle. She read with fervor, chiefly what her mother called knowledge-books because, although novels, the poorest as well as the best, seemed all a delightful invitation, she had doubts whether they might not prove a waste of time. Great parcels of books came to her from week to week, often from publishers and again from the library of the old Gorse house at Longford, fifty miles away. This was the house that had belonged to Barton's mother, and now, while he was abroad, it was leased by the minister, and to him Barton had left the task of making studious selection of

books for a learned young lady who meant to be great. All these books Thyrza was saving with care, for she knew they would some time go back on Barton Gorse's shelves; the few novels she carried, according to his orders, to the little circulating library where "Queechy" and "The Wide Wide World" made the top notch of excellence.

It was this sedate reading which had set her apart from her mates; but now, in her new estate of happiness, she longed to be nearer them. It seemed to her that, if she was to be married, she might even take to long hours of sewing on bleached cloth for her "setting out"; and one afternoon, in a foretaste of domestic ardor, she took some serpentine braid that had lain in her mother's basket, and ran over to Rosie May's, to crochet. Rosie May, sitting by the window in a sprigged challis, her fair hair crimped to a high degree of excellence, saw her coming and called to her mother, in the kitchen scouring tins, —

"There 's Thyrza Tennant. What do you s'pose she wants?"

Mrs. Pelton's ankles troubled her seriously, and she was making her scouring festival a stationary process, all her implements collected within arm's reach. She gave one fleeting glance from the window and did not answer, and Thyrza, opening the side-door and making her way in, according to the country custom, found Rosie May alone. Thyrza blushed beautifully, all over her face. She was conscious of the rarity of this gregarious mood.

"I thought I'd come over," she said awkwardly, "and see if you'd show me how to crochet."

"Why, yes," said Rosie May. She was hemstitching a ruffle, with a pucker of her pretty forehead when she counted threads. "Sit down. For the land, Thyrza! what makes that braid so yellow?"

"Mother got it a good many years ago," said Thyrza. "It's been lying in her basket. I guess she bought it for us, and she never's had time from her tailoring to put the edge on." Her voice deepened as she looked back at those years of hurried stitches. "I guess 't is n't very clean either."

"Well, it'll wash out," said Rosie May practically. "Here, you take this needle. Yours is a mile too big."

They bent their heads together over the work, and Rosie's plump finger flew back and forth in a fashion that seemed to Thyrza the perfection of graceful ease. After a time Thyrza caught the knack, though she worked with a stiffened wrist, and they sat each at her window, weaving and talking.

"When's Andy comin' home again?" asked Rosie May suddenly. She did not look up, but Thyrza felt the piercingness of the question and flushed richly.

"I don't know," she answered.

"I did n't know but what you might have heard old Mis' McAdam say."

"No."

"She was terrible set up after he come, mother said."

"Yes, oh, yes," agreed Thyrza, earnestly, with the

relief of veering away from Andy's name. "Why, she's been as ambitious! It almost seems as if she could see better. I suppose it's because she's got so much more courage."

"I think Andy's awful good-lookin', don't you?" asked Rosie May.

The question seemed like an assault, it came so near.

"I don't know as he's changed much," said Thyrza, with dignity.

Rosie May laughed.

"Well, he's grown some, ain't he?" she pursued.

"I don't know's he has, since he went away," said Thyrza obstinately. "He was tall then and he's tall now."

"Well, anyway, he's an awful handsome fellow. I used to think his hair was goin' to be red, but now it's a little mite darker, I would n't have it changed for the world."

Thyrza remembered, with an aching throat, the touch of the soft thick hair against her cheek. She came to her feet because it seemed impossible to sit there another instant and hear Rosie May's innocent, clumsy footsteps sounding through her house of dreams. But Rosie May had scurried without warning into another track. She had dropped her work in her lap. Her blue eyes, rounder than their wont, were staring out of the window.

"There's the depot carriage," she said. "Who's he brought over? Why, Thyrza Tennant, I believe to my soul that's Barton Gorse's bag. Barton's stopped

to your house an' sent his big on along home. You see if 't ain't so."

Rosie was standing now, one hand on the window-sill, in the attitude of peering. Thyrza, too, came to her feet.

"I must go," she said, and with her coil of edging grasped, regardless of method, she hurried out and ran along the road.

When she reached her mother's house, Barton Gorse had knocked and waited at the door, and now he was walking down the path. Mrs. Tennant, Thyrza knew, had gone for a rare afternoon hour's shopping, and the door was locked.

"I'm coming," she called, and Barton waited for her.

He had changed, in a puzzling way, since leaving Leafy Road, the year before. Then, although he was her tutor, he had not seemed so very much older. They were comrades in so many fashions that his knowing the roots of words, and his acquaintance with the far mysterious world that was as yet to her but as a picture in a book, had not really removed him from her. Now he had developed, not actually perhaps in contour, but into an air of worldly ease that seemed to add to his breadth and stature. His face had hardly changed, the serious face with its sudden flashing smile, except that now it had a settled look of pain, born, she knew, of something accepted, something silently endured. Thyrza wondered, with a swift sympathetic throb, what the look meant.

They met, and he held her hand in his and gazed at her. She was flushed by her haste, and his eyes betrayed a frank delight in her, a surprise, even, that she surpassed his expectation.

"Can't we walk?" he asked. "I want to see your mother, but not yet."

She assented, and they turned back on the road by which he had come. He began at once to talk.

"Thyrza, I did so want to see you."

Her face was lifted eagerly.

"Have you come to stay?" she asked.

"No, only a night. I'm due at Lava Lake. My sister's there."

"Mrs. Davidson?"

"Yes, my sister Helen."

Since Thyrza had grown up, she had heard some of the stories about Helen Davidson: how she had, in her beautiful youth, run away with a man who afterwards, when his wife died, had married her. How she was still as beautiful as in her youth she had been daring, and how for a year or more, cast off by society for her erratic course, she had taken refuge with a colony of people who believed no more than she did in the established order of life.

"She'd been there before, had n't she?"

"Yes." He spoke rapidly, glancing at her from time to time, as if this were a story he had meant to tell her when the moment should serve, and walking a step ahead of her now, so that he could turn and interrogate her face. "She left there to join her hus-

band. Now she's come back. Thyrza, I'm afraid my sister's miserable."

She had nothing to say that would adequately match the misgiving of his tone. He continued, —

"She has written me the truth at last. You didn't know, of course, — none of the people here know, — how unfortunate her marriage was."

Thyrza opened her lips for the innocent counter-assurance that indeed she knew; but it became at once evident to her that his only comfort, in his hurt apprehension, was to believe his sister's sorrow had been hidden.

"The first of her being with him," he went on, "was all a horror, a miserable, ignorant, splendid act of love. She went away with him, Thyrza, before his wife died. She was despised by her own friends. I can't forget it." His drawn face showed how temperate his words were beside the shame and fierce partisanship he remembered. "They talked about her as if she were a different kind of woman." His mouth shut savagely on the words as if he bit them off. "They didn't know her. She was the sweetest girl, Thyrza, the most innocent — "

"I saw her once," Thyrza made haste to tell him. "She was perfectly lovely."

"His wife died and he married her. But she had only about strength enough to live through that horrible time when she was on her defense against the world. She began to break. He began to hate her. He was ambitious, by that time. He had gone

into politics and his domestic past was brought up against him. Well, Thyrza, my sister's wretched. That's the end of it all. She's wretched."

"And she's at Lava Lake?"

"That's the strange part of it. She is with that colony of men and women on the border of the little lake I told you about. They have gone there to lead the higher life, they say. She has joined them because her husband cast her off and because she has no social affiliations any more. At last she has written to me. I am going to her to-morrow."

"Society is cruel!" Thyrza had all the fierce wayward certainty of youth. She saw the world arrayed against a broken creature who, from excess of courage, had defied it, but only out of a sweet innocence.

"It has been cruel to her. But I wanted to see you. I wanted to ask you, if I can persuade her to come here, if you would be with her at the house. She'll have a maid, you know, but if she could be sure of somebody like you to sit with her, read to her, talk about the innocent things girls like — Thyrza, would your mother let you?"

"Certainly I should do it," cried Thyrza, in an ecstasy of response. She saw herself already dedicated to the rescue of miserable innocence, and knew at last what it had meant when, a child, she had wondered if she should not some time go as a missionary. All sacrifice had been beautiful to her; this was the supreme leap for which her will had been gathering.

Barton had continued.

"You see, when I thought of you and how she'd love to have you with her, I had n't considered I'd no right to ask you. Don't you see, Thyrza, she's just the same woman to the world as if she was n't a hurt angel to me? The world would say I'd no business to ask a young girl like you—and you above all people—to go to a woman with a name like hers."

"Oh, they could n't be so cruel!" cried Thyrza. "They could n't."

"Yes, they could."

"Then it's all dreadful."

"It is dreadful. And if your mother was a worldly woman she would n't let you go."

"She will let me go," said Thyrza. "I shall go." Her face matched her tone. It was the tone of willful and deliberate resolve.

"You are a dear," said Barton. "Anyway, it's sweet to have you want to go. I have n't asked you about yourself, Thyrza. You have n't written much to me."

She shook her head. Her clear look met his, in a wonder, now she had seen him, that she should have thought it hard to write.

"I could n't seem to," she answered.

"Well, now I am home, you must tell me everything."

Everything! She could not tell him about Andy. That suddenly seemed, not a dissonant note, but an unfamiliar one, in their old harmony.

"Let us go back," he said. "I must see your

mother. I want to talk to her about Helen. But I don't know how. I can't ask her if her daughter may come to see my sister. I can't put Helen in that place. It's easier to talk to you. But perhaps I should n't even have done that."

"Mother has n't got back." Thyrza was glad the theme must be deferred. Her mother was too literal, too simple, to be confronted, unprepared, by a great burning question like this, the rescue of innocence. It would only bewilder her, though, if it could be presented circumspectly, Thyrza knew what she would say. "She's going to wait for the six o'clock, to see if there's a letter from Laura. Let me tell her."

"You must n't persuade her. You must abide by what she says. You're not teaching?"

"School closed early this spring."

They were at her gate, and she paused, her hand on the latch, with a pondering look at him. It was better that he should not wait, but it was lovely to see him, and she wished he could stay, though his months of absence and the strange countries he had seen were farthest from their thoughts. They were both intent, out of passionate pity, on Helen Davidson and her wrongs. But Barton Gorse saw again how exquisite Thyrza was, with the beauty of strength and tempered fibre. She had made the most of her youth. She walked well and stood well, and looked the world in the eye when it challenged her, and, for the rest, inheritance and country living had done its best for her. She was a fine young creature, and he

took off his hat with a homage of which she was suddenly aware. She met it with a flush and a surprised and kindling glance.

"I must go," he said. "Good-by, Thyrza."

She could hardly wait to see her mother, although the martial fire in her was ready to flame up if her mother could withstand the pathos of the question. At last Mrs. Tennant came, weighted by bundles, and disposed them hastily on the kitchen table. She turned a flushed face upon Thyrza, with the bright, half-triumphant look of one who has brought news. Thyrza read the signal.

"Any letter?" she asked.

"Yes."

Mrs. Tennant extended the letter and then withheld it, though Thyrza's fingers were upon it, to take the eager privilege of telling the news herself. "It's only a line. Aunt Mary's sick. The doctor don't offer any hope."

Thyrza's heart gave a great bound. The long exile might be nearly over. Laura would come home.

"Does she want us to go over?"

"No. Aunt Mary wouldn't hear to that. Laura says it may be a long pull; but there's no hope."

Thyrza read the letter absently. It seemed a simple thing that there should rest a joyous satisfaction in there being no hope. Aunt Mary led such a weighted life that Thyrza was innocently agreed to think of her as elsewhere; and she had many things to talk about with Laura.

"Mother," she said, "Barton Gorse has been here."

"You don't say! He goin' to stay right along?"

Mrs. Tennant had seated herself, in a brief concession to her aching feet and to what she would have called a "goneness" within her, something that responded to her every thought of Laura and was ready now upon the intimation that their long parting might be over soon.

"He stayed over a train. His sister Helen may come here to live." She watched her mother.

But Mrs. Tennant's mind still dwelt on Laura. She answered absently.

"Helen Gorse ain't been here since she was your age. She was pretty then, pretty as a picture." Thyrza waited. Her mother, as if in answer to that inward interrogation, woke to a clearer memory. "She 's had a queer kind of a life. I guess she ain't been all she should be."

Thyrza flew into the wild defense she had been preparing.

"Mother, you don't know! we don't any of us know!"

Mrs. Tennant stared at her briefly.

"Well," she returned, "mebbe we don't. I 've heard the whole story, but I can't say 's any of us have got the rights on 't. Here! you empt' the sugar an' I 'll see to the rest the things."

She got upon her ill-used feet and trotted off, at her working pace, into the pantry. Thyrza followed her.

"Mother," she said, "if she comes here, I'm going to be with her a good deal. Barton Gorse asked me to. She is n't strong."

"Well," said Mrs. Tennant, "I don't know how handy you'd be nursin'."

"Should you mind my being with her?"

"Why, no, not if you feel to." Then the mother instinct went on hungering for Laura.

Thyrza stepped about the house that day in a proud certainty that her opportunity had come. She always knew she had a mission, and she had interrogated God about it unceasingly.

But when two more days had gone, there was a letter from Barton Gorse. He was with his sister at the Lava Lake colony, a place of dire melancholy to him, but where she seemed moderately content. She refused definitely to think of going home with him, and he was the more disappointed in that he saw how she brightened when he spoke of her having Thyrza's company. She had instantly responded that Thyrza might be a companion or a secretary. She remembered Thyrza well, a little bright-eyed girl who used to come with thimbleberries. She was often very lonely with her maid, and at the colony they were all too intellectual. Barton explained that this was her own charitable opinion; to his mind the colonists were nomadic folk of an enthusiastic turn who had resuscitated certain ancient and mystical beliefs and dressed them in new clothes, to live by. The company was added unto, as its sum was capriciously depleted, by more of the

eccentric and unsettled for whom crude philosophy had a charm, and they seemed to him, he was sorry to say, all mad as hatters. Helen wanted Thyrza very much. She even proposed inviting her to the lake, a salaried companion. That, of course, her mother would not advise, nor could he; but if he could persuade Helen to go with him to Leafy Road, he depended on his little friend to be neighborly to them both.

Thyrza had no sooner devoured the letter than she knew what was to do. She called into the kitchen where Mrs. Tennant was mixing bread, —

"Mother, I 'm going to Lava Lake."

Mrs. Tennant let her floury hands rest on the cushion of dough and waited, the anxious scowl between her eyes. Thyrza explained. She even read a part of the letter.

"You see," she ended, "they need me."

"I don't see 's he says so," ventured Mrs. Tennant.

It seemed to Thyrza very noble of him not to make the summons more direct. She was exactly like the child she had been when she thought of some demanding quest.

"They want me," she responded solemnly. "They need me."

Mrs. Tennant still failed to see that clearly, but she was used to yielding in an acquiescence, not perhaps humble but rather matter-of-course, while Thyrza, who had a larger outlook through books and mysterious ambitions, mapped out uncharted ways. She could only repeat, "If you feel to," and then she helped

pack the little hair trunk that seemed to Thyrza of rather a doubtful and unsophisticated excellence; and, in this great access of newness mingled with the possibility of Laura's coming, felt life stir about her in a way that made her young. Nothing save the dramatic event of Laura's exile had happened for years; but now it seemed as if life were surging about them, and as if her children were the ones the waves of f[illegible]ne were uplifted for.

Then it was morning, and Thyrza had asked the Pelton boy to carry her trunk to the station, and at three o'clock she had gone, sitting very straight in the farm-wagon and turning on her mother a look quite passionate, at last. Thyrza's tender heart smote her. She wondered now whether she ought to leave her mother. She had those choking pangs that were always assailing her for people she loved, and the untried world before her loomed dark and strange.

"O mother!" she called. The boy pulled up and Mrs. Tennant came forward and laid her hand on the wheel.

"You ain't forgot anything?" she asked. Her face, uplifted in the spring light, was all dry channels, not of emotion but of wear. Thyrza stepped out of the wagon and put her arms about her mother and kissed her.

"Mother! mother!" she repeated, in a muffled undertone.

"There!" said Mrs. Tennant. "You'll be late for the cars." But though she put Thyrza away, her own

face was suffused in response to that sudden passion; and when the wagon disappeared at the curve, she had tears in her eyes. There was something irrevocable about the parting.

From three o'clock to five Thyrza went on her unfamiliar way. She was not used to traveling and she suspected that there were many easy habits of it to lea fore she could escape notice by the device of behaving like everybody else. She sat primly, to seem capable of everything. The other travelers were wildly interesting to her and yet in a way potentially unfriendly: for who could say when they might not begin to smile at her country manners? The landscape from the window was different from her natal ground. She had talked about mountains and valleys, but when her mind conjured up the dry land, what she had always seen was her own rolling level near the sea. But here were hills and the dark clefts and sweet hollows between them. It was all delicate airy blue in the light and sombre in shadow, and the majesty of it brought the tears to her eyes and a rising of the heart because now she was going out into so wonderful a world, and for so noble an end. Then the day stilled into quiet before dusk, and she was at Troy Junction, where she had an hour to wait. It was not so easy to her timid mind to leave the car and encounter new faces at the station; but she straightened herself, to look like an habitual traveler, and made her descent. She crossed the platform toward the waiting-room and a figure stayed her. Some one took her bag. It was Andy.

Thyrza, after the first start of wonder, looked up at him in a quivering adoration. She was just tired enough, just homesick enough, to feel all her blood turn with a rush toward the accustomed and fling herself into its kind arms. That it should be Andy seemed to her like fate. She could only say his name, and then she followed him unquestioningly while he led the way out from the station and into a tree-shaded road where spring was beginning. Then he asked her, with much interest, where she had been going. Thyrza told him, and he frowned.

"Don't have too much to do with that fellow," he said, after she had spoken of Barton's letter. "I never thought any too much of him."

That had a sound of virile, elemental jealousy, and her heart responded to it. New emotions were rising in her, and suddenly she made out that she had an impetuous self in hand, one that saluted Andy unhesitatingly and called him master. She did not look at him now; yet the one glance on the platform had snatched a picture she could never forget. Andy had been walking, and now he was flushed by a pink as pretty as that on a girl's cheek. He carried his hat in his hand, and a moist, thick lock of hair fell over his forehead as it used to do, Thyrza remembered, when he was a boy and had run away from her with some of her treasures until Laura called him back. Something besides the charm of his strong presence inspirited her now; it was the pure triumph of finding him voluntarily at her side.

"Where are you going?" she asked at length, softly, with a late curiosity. Yet really it was only to fill up a pause. To have him there beside her was again a fate, not to be questioned.

"Down to Leafy Road," he answered rather absently. Andy was thinking of a man who had just betrayed him in a business deal. When he met Thyrza, he had been cursing the man in his mind, and now an ugly devil was still regnant in him. He felt destructive. He wanted to hurt and slay. Yet it was good to see Thyrza, who had an impetuous kindness for him, after all the years, and who looked like home.

"To see grandma?" she was asking, still with that pretty shyness.

Then he remembered her again.

"Yes," he answered. "To see you."

"Oh, I'm glad I met you," said Thyrza. "O Andy, I'm so glad!"

They were in a darkened stretch of road, with cedars on each side, and at the thrill in her voice he put his arm about her and drew her to him. She looked up at him adoringly, with a little sigh, and he kissed her.

"By George!" said Andy wonderingly, "I believe you do like me."

"Like you!" she repeated. She wished he would use the greater word, but since he had not chosen it, she dared not.

He was looking eagerly into her face like one who sought a gift.

"Say, Thyrza," he was urging, "don't wait for the train. Walk on to Troy Town, and pick up the train there. There's a tavern at Troy Town. We'll get somethin' to eat. Then you can take the eight o'clock."

She withdrew from him, though the adventure seemed delightful to her.

"But when 'll you get your train?" she asked.

"I'll wait till mornin'. There's another one at six."

Somehow, she did not know how, but entirely with her consent, they were walking quite fast with long, according steps, and Andy was talking. He told her a man had used him like the devil, and she said, "Poor Andy!" They had owned a claim together, Andy said, and the chap had been cleverer than he and pocketed a thousand of his money. There was enough left to make him comfortable as long as he lived, but he hated to be done. He grew morose then. She pitied him, and he told her she was a dear old girl. But he spoke absently, and Thyrza felt, with a pang, as she had before when she seemed about to be most happy with him, that his whole mind was not with her. But, she reflected humbly, it might be so with all men who had great affairs to think of. She did not know. Then he asked her a question or two about Helen Davidson, and almost in the words she had heard the country people use,—"she was no better than she should be."

Thyrza flew to her defense. A woman like Helen, she told him, was above society and above the law.

Walking fast through the deepening shades, with the cold moist air of the ravines upon her cheek, she felt as if she were for the first time gloriously free, led by great simple certainties that are above the world. She spoke further in Helen's defense, and Andy heard amazedly. Now at last she had made him listen, half with this incredulous wonder, half admiration of what seemed to be her foolhardy courage.

"You're a great girl, Thyrza," he kept saying. "I never thought you'd turn into this kind of a girl."

The moon came out and glinted here and there through the cedars, and still they walked, past farmhouses with a lonely light and again into other stretches of wood.

"We've got to put on steam," said Andy. He took out his watch, and struck a match. "By George, Thyrza, there's your train!"

It was shrieking into the station ahead of them, a mile away. She snatched at her bag, but he withheld it, though he quickened his steps with hers.

"Oh, we must run," she cried. "Andy, I must get my train."

"I'm sorry," he was repeating while they pelted on. "Honest I am, Thyrza." His voice rang true, and though she believed it, there was no comfort for her in anything less than the miracle that might knit up her broken journey. He stopped and laid his hand detainingly on hers.

"No use, Thyrza. There goes your train."

It was groaning out of the station, and they heard

it rolling off into the night, leaving only the ghostly silence it had overpowered. Thyrza spoke.

"Well, it's nobody's fault but my own." But though she drew upon her old stiff dignity, she sobbed as she said it, and Andy, hearing, was again sorry for her.

He answered soberly.

"We'll stop at the tavern an' have supper. Then I'll leave you there an' in the mornin' you can go ahead."

They walked laggingly into the little town and up to the low-browed tavern at the market-square. It was gay with lights, and there were voices in excited chorus. Andy paused doubtfully at the door, but some one opened it, and they faced a reeling rout of dancers, country girls and boys at their gayest, yet all respectable and decorous, a "circle" at its pranks. Yet it was the world, however simple, and Andy, facing it, drew Thyrza into the room and up to the desk. Everybody looked at them. They were too splendid in their youth and height and color not to be stared at, and Thyrza, conscious of her shy discomfort, held her head high, as if with pride. Then she heard Andy ordering supper for himself and — that was the word — his wife. Immediately, it seemed, they were at a small table at one end of the dining-room, where a large one had been made of boards and benches for the dancers to sit at later. Thyrza looked at Andy across the cloth. Her eyes reproached him sombrely.

"How could you?" she asked.

He was laughing now, in great spirits. She had never seen anybody so merry with a kind of intoxication of being glad. He leaned across the table and looked at her.

"You like me, Thyrza," he challenged her. "You know you do."

"You make fun of sacred things!"

"Do I? What are sacred things?"

"That word was sacred."

But he could not remember what word he had said, and she would not tell him.

When the supper had been brought and they were eating, he said to her, with a sudden earnestness, —

"Thyrza, you do like me?"

It seemed to her the time to use the great word, and she answered slowly, so low that he could hardly hear, —

"I love you, Andy."

It was done. She had told him, and now she knew he would tell her.

"What if you thought you never were goin' to see me again?"

She held her lips from quivering.

"It's true, Thyrza." He was watching her, not cruelly, nor speciously, but with an excited wonder that a girl of Thyrza's type could be so reckless. "I'm goin' back west — "

"You said you were going to Leafy Road."

"That was only for a day, to say good-by."

"But you 'll go?"

"No. I lost the train."

"You lost the train?"

"Yes, for you. You made me lose it. You were so sweet, Thyrza."

"Shan't you come back?"

"Oh, yes, I shall come back. But if you like me, Thyrza, you must tell me about it. We've got to tell each other."

At once she felt most happy and most miserable. The greatest thing in life had raced to find her, and she was in an ecstasy of union with the earth, the stars, the sky; only she was not content. It was like the sea, rather, an immensity of unrest. But she accepted her tumultuous dower because it was, she felt, inevitable. Other women had received it with the same sad rapture, only, looking on, one could perhaps have said they were happy or not happy at all. But in her perplexing case no one from outside, she knew, could possibly have told any more than she could tell herself, whether she was happy. She was simply leagued forever to unrest and she must be obedient to it. She looked at Andy with a pathetic seeking, and he saw her lips tremble. Again it amazed him. Thyrza, even when she was a child, had been so independent and so proud.

"Yes, Andy," she said, in her newly accepted obedience to him. "I do want to talk to you."

Then he had gone to the desk, leaving her to sit there in an access of shyness, holding her head high

because the dancers in the next room might see her as they passed the open doorway, and yet not knowing there was anything to fear; and he came back with a key and said to her in his kindest tone,—

"Come, he'll show us a room."

The clerk, too, was waiting, with a light. Thyrza rose; the dancers embarrassed her, and she was grateful to escape.

"Do you know about the train?" she asked Andy.

"Yes. Five o'clock."

"For Lava Lake?" She insisted, and now she turned to the waiting clerk. "You sure there's a train at five o'clock?"

He did not answer for an instant because he was held by the look in her eyes, a clear, beautiful look that, one would have known, was the look of innocence. But he recovered himself quickly and answered that the train was at five and he would be sure to call them half an hour beforehand.

The room where he left them was a great square chamber untouched in essentials since the building of the house, two hundred years before. It had dignified wainscoting and great brass locks, and a fireplace.

"What a queer paper," said Thyrza, struck by the soft pink background and the spindling flowers. "Pretty, too."

But Andy had unpinned her hat with a deftness that amazed her, and then he put out the light because, he said, the moonlight was so pretty, and took her in his arms.

"Thyrza," he told her roughly, "I ain't fit for you to like."

She put him away from her an arm's length, and looked at him solemnly, in the moonlighted chamber.

"You are my prince," she said, in a thrilling voice. "You are my king."

Andy was gazing at her as solemnly, it seemed to her, but his tone was all amazement.

"Thyrza, what a queer girl you are!" But in an instant he had put an arm round her waist and drawn her to the window where light was flooding in, through the sparse foliage of the locusts, and Thyrza's cheek was touching his in a caressing stillness. She was happy at last, she told herself. The dancing measure of the violins and bass-viol came up from below, and lifted her soul on beating sound, and she seemed to discover that everybody was happy.

"I never dreamt of this happenin', did you?" Andy whispered.

"Never!" A thought of Laura made her heart bound toward her sister in a great flood of desire to tell her everything: that she was beloved, that she was going to be married. Nay, that she was married already; for she knew nothing could be more sacred than the troth they had plighted by this seclusion, and the thought of Helen Davidson, choosing her lover against a foolish world, had put a fighting element into her allegiance to him. She laughed happily over the memory of home.

"I wonder," she breathed, "what Laura'll say!"

He withdrew from her, and in the moonlight she saw him scowl.

"What is it?" she trembled.

He was silent, and then he asked her, as if spurred by an irresistible curiosity, against his will, —

"What kind of a girl is Laura?" But he did not wait for her to answer. "What's the use?" he said. "I ain't seen her since she was a little thing."

Then he drew her back into his arms again, and asked her questions. He seemed inspired by a boundless curiosity about her liking for him. Had she always liked him? Had it lasted since they were children, all through the time of his running away?

"Always," Thyrza told him, simply. Since it was love now, she knew it must always have been love, for that was unchanging and eternal. Then, when she clung to her avowal, he had nothing to say but more wonder over her queerness, and though Thyrza was conscious of a pang at his dull words, unlike romance, she contented herself with thinking he was a man, and must speak according to his kind. Only poets could plead like Romeo, and she was entirely conscious, in the sane certainties of her mind, that Andy would not understand if she told him what Romeo had said. But that made no difference to her. His passion and Romeo's were the same, and for her own private treasury, one that could not be shared, she had the memory of poetic words to fit into the lovely night, like flowers in a wreath. He was telling

her now, in a sudden remembered bitterness, how his crony had done him, and declaring nobody could be trusted.

"Why, Andy!" said Thyrza.

He laughed then, and kissed her.

"I take it back," he said. "Except you, Thyrza. You 're the top of the tree. What would you do for me?"

"Die for you," said Thyrza solemnly, in her poet's jargon.

"How long will you like me? Say, girl, say?"

"Why, forever, Andy!" She was half crying in her wonder over his scoffing, and more and more, in spite of her allegiance to him, she felt the strangeness of their difference. The pain of love had begun, she told herself, as the poets said it did. It was joy and pain. And always, in the sea of her thoughts was the memory of Helen Davidson, who had elected to follow her lover though she lost the world, and of Tristan and Isolde, who had died. The hurt of finding he had only brief uncouth responses to the rhapsodies that seemed in a moment sweetly natural to her, she accepted like something she must bear because Andy was what he was. But he loved her, and she could make him different.

It was dawn when they parted at the door of the chamber and went down to the disordered room where the dancing had been two hours over. Thyrza walked calmly now, not with the semblance of pride that covers shyness; she felt regnant over life. Andy

paid something at the desk, and they walked away together. She had refused to eat there with him, — why, she did not know, and he had had sandwiches and fruit put up for them both. While they were still within the cover of the cedar trees before the station, he dropped one little package into her bag.

"There!" said he, "you can eat it as soon as you're aboard."

Dismay seized upon her.

"Why, Andy," she faltered, "you're not going to leave me?"

He laughed a little.

"Why," said he, "ain't you goin' to the lake?"

"But I thought —" She was confused. She had thought that everything was different, that his claim had cancelled lesser ones and they should never be separated any more. But she could not say to him, "I thought I was going with you."

"We've got to hurry," said Andy. "Wait a minute. I'm goin' to leave you here."

"O Andy, why?"

"We were seen goin' away from the station together. We don't want to go back together. I ain't thinkin' of myself. I'm thinkin' of you."

"But Andy —" She was the more confused. Then they were not to be together — not yet.

"Ain't you goin' to the lake?"

"Yes, if you tell me, Andy."

He put her bag into her hand. He compelled her notice.

"Now, Thyrza, listen to me. Bitterness, how his in five minutes. You go, an' do as you ady could be

"Yes, Andy."

Her eyes were brimming, and they were his with a look he had not seen in them bet was not reproach. The look was gentle, but it he the knowledge of the tree of life. He smiled at her with an irritating kindliness. Andy wished well to everybody. All his great impatiences came when he was thwarted, never otherwise.

"I 'll write to you," he promised her. "I 'll be true to you, so help me God!"

"You 're coming for me?"

"Yes, yes, of course, Thyrza."

"When will you come?" she insisted feverishly.

"Soon, soon! As soon as I can manage it. There! I hear it down the valley. Run! there 's a good girl. Run!"

She took her bag and fled along the road. The train came in, and presently it was carrying her away.

VII

THE RETURN

YEARS ago, a syndicate built a hotel on the shore of Lava Lake, and judging, from a too impetuous trust in probability, that there would be an overflow from this main building, put up also a colony of cottages where guests should lodge, going thence to the hotel table. That was when sulphur was discovered, and the newspapers had blossomed into encomiums of the mountain air and healing properties of the springs. The air continued to waft clear currents and to uplift the spirits, and the springs never ceased to gush; but for some hidden reason no one came to the hotel. The syndicate melted, the hotel itself drifted through all stages of decay and became a shelter for picnickers and a lodging-house for tramps. From this time it grew to be a point of prowess with sojourners to break several panes of glass before leaving, and one day, some one bolder than the rest kicked out a door. Then ravage and decay reigned together. The Frenchies at Bass Point came over to extract firewood from its walls, and the long winter storms filled it with snow that sometimes lay there while the arethusa bloomed outside. Gales from the lake assaulted it until its flimsy frame went down, and then raspberry bushes grew up within the wide verandas.

Meantime the little houses, from security of hum-

bleness, had better withstood the chances of decline. In one an insane preacher who believed that the end of the world had come and that he was living in paradise, had laid his pallet of grass gathered from the pasture about, and sat all day at his door looking abroad with a beatific smile, and telling raspberry-pickers from the village that he saw Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that their own eyes were holden or they also could see. A runaway couple took refuge in another until a domestic storm should have blown over, and lived on bananas and biscuits until hunger forced them out.

Then the Believers came. They were a body pledged to mystical certainties which nobody outside their cult, they said, had ever formulated, and they had come together chiefly because of weariness in a world where sects divide and business smites and slays. They were all men and women of an untidily abstruse turn of mind, and of no mental training. Black, as it had been accepted by practical dyers, never meant black to them. White was anything but precisely white. They were eager to think it might be the good purpose of God to maintain a fluid universe, and cause any appearance to flow into any other, to suit the individual need. They had gathered from popular expositions of oriental secrets a vast quantity of ragged theory, and accepted it with a joyous belief that it had never been transmitted before; and they wanted more than anything else to be good. They were good, — a set of mild, well-wishing, industrious creatures, who,

through their esoteric hospitality, had established a claim on the next world and all worlds, and who ate no meat. They had, with much trouble, put together a small sum of money and bought up the cottages and the land about them, and after honest but not always picturesque efforts to make the cottages water-tight, had lived in them, making homespun rugs, braiding mats, weaving coverlets, and in other ways ministering to the taste of a public roused to the æsthetic value of colonial semblances. They were the Believers, they were ready to tell you, with a look of grateful happiness; and if you asked what they believed, they would go off into rapt reminiscences of discursive reading, their faces shining like the sun.

Helen Davidson had come to them by chance. She had been suddenly ill when she and her husband had taken a day's excursion on the little boat that plies up and down the lake, and had landed to ask if she might spend the night. The Believers found her beautiful. Her elegance contrasted strangely with their own tough type, that had long left comeliness behind. Her clothes, also, models of the latest wear, fine in embroidery and lace, seemed worshipfully lovely to them, and women dressed in brown skirts and dark blue waists, crowded about her to finger her fabrics, with a naïve curiosity. They were like savages over the first white man, and Helen at first had laughed. Then she loved them, they were so kind, and gave away her trinkets to them. But these, though they held them sadly for a moment, they could not accept.

They were vowed to individual poverty, notwithstanding that the community might fatten and increase, premising, after a certain accumulation, that it was to spend its surplus on the poor.

To Helen, thrown too much on her husband, after her runaway exile with him and their delayed marriage, this was a window into an infinity of simple kindness. She had left the world that scorned her. This was another sphere. So when her husband unpremeditatedly withdrew from her, because he had not bargained for a woman who brought him public ill-fortune by sacrificing, in the eye of the world, more than he had ever, after the first, besought, she took her way again as fast as train and boat would carry her to the Believers; and because they adored her and found her different from themselves, she was allowed to keep her maid and merely to pay board without sharing their manual tasks. Here she floated on a sea of calm. There were no very young people among the Believers. They did not judge it best to admit postulants under thirty-five, an age at which doubts and mental fears might reasonably cease.

Thyrza, landing from the boat in the early morning, walked up the path toward the cottages to find her. She passed the ruined hotel where the raspberries grew, and glanced at it with a transient interest, because her studious mind bade her observe. She had seen many sights that day new to her untraveled eyes, but now even the mountain, its long wavy line fretted by firs, seemed meagre to her. Something

had dulled her spirits and eaten up the zest of her challenge to life. She was a little tired, she told herself with some wonder, the sensation was so new to her, — sad, too, for she had left her lover behind. At a steep pitch in the path she stopped, with a momentary return of pulsing vigor. There was the smell of firs hot under the morning sun; at this point, for some reason, there was always a waft of it. Here, too, a woman met her, a thin, dry creature between thirty and forty, with brown hair curled tight and twisted into a knot, a tanned face and bright eyes. She was dressed in brown and blue, the uniform of the Believers, and her sleeves were rolled to her elbows, over strong, thin arms. Thyrza looked at her and hesitated before a question.

"What is it?" asked the woman. She had a voice of beautiful sweetness, so soft that it arrested the mind with a promise of something unforeseen. Thyrza drew a quick little breath. At this reaction she suddenly learned how homesick she had been and how forlorn. The woman was manifestly a guide to hospitable things.

"I want to find Mrs. Davidson," said Thyrza. "I 've come to stay with her."

The woman smiled delightfully.

"It 's that cottage up there," she answered, pointing, "the one with the ferns along the front."

She gave a nod and turned, and Thyrza, thanking her, went on. She kept her eyes on the cottage, and her heart beat hard. She thought herself a fool to

have come on a mission of tenderness to this orderly place where life had been going on without her, and people like the brown-faced woman were about Helen Davidson, ready to love and serve. So it was feeling very small and with no conceit of herself that she went up the steps of the veranda and came upon a lady dressed in white, and lying in a long chair. This was Helen Davidson, she knew at once. She was like the family, only with a fragility, an appealingness, all her own. She had a pale cheek and wistful violet eyes with black lashes and beautiful dark brows. Her thick soft hair was like a shadow, and her hands, in their white delicacy, like no hands Thyrza had ever seen. Thyrza felt a great timidity and an enormous doubt of her own value to so wonderful a creature. All the gifts she had to bring seemed coarse and useless. The lady was looking at her. She spoke in a gentle voice.

"Did Margaret Petrie send you here?"

"Margaret Petrie?"

"I saw you talking with her in the path. Did she send you?"

"I asked the way," said Thyrza. Her voice choked her. At once she knew that she, not the lady, was the one who needed help. She felt "wee," as she had once heard Barton Gorse say, when he was pitying her after she had been ill, and it came over her that her mother was not here. Helen Davidson must have read some of these things in her face, for she rose, and took Thyrza's bag from her.

"Are you one of the Believers?" she asked sweetly.

"No," said Thyrza. "My name is Thyrza Tennant. I came to stay with you. Your brother asked me to because you were 'most alone."

She saw Helen flushing all over her face. The warm blood made it bloom out into a wonderful beauty, and even in its worn loveliness it could be seen how enchanting a girl she must have been.

"How perfectly lovely that was of Barton," she cried. "You're little Thyrza Tennant! Why, you're taller than I am. Take off your hat. Mary O'Brien! Mary!"

A rosy maid appeared from the room within. Thyrza was afraid of her. She was not used to maids who wore such white aprons with a glossy surface. All the domestics she knew were help, and it was only by a turn of fortune's wheel that she had not been help herself. If she had not taken to books and inherited the district school from the minister's serious daughter, she could have hoped for nothing more exalted.

Helen Davidson fluttered about in a happy fever, putting Thyrza into a comfortable chair when she refused to lie down, taking her hat, wafting Mary away for coffee and rolls. It was evidently a delight to her to have a guest all her own, and one decreed by Barton.

"It's like a letter from him," she exclaimed. "Poor old chap! he hated so to go. I had to make him."

Thyrza sat up straight.

"To go?" She faltered. "I thought he would be here."

"He's gone to England. My uncle wanted him—my uncle, Mr. Updike, the author. I made him go."

"How could he go?" said Thyrza, in a daze of wonder. She was breaking through the crust of her timidity, almost to argue and expostulate. "He wanted to be with you. He wanted it more than anything in all the world."

The color rushed to Helen's face. She looked for an instant fiercely proud, as if through memory of the arguments it had taken to dismiss him, the bitterness of using them.

"I made him," she said coldly. "My uncle had written to me. He's afraid Barton will waste his life. He wanted me to use my influence. I used it. I told Bart I liked to be alone."

Her face quivered passionately, but at once she put the topic by, as a completed issue, recalling herself to a sweet interest in the stranger to whom she had, with one of her intemperate impulses, shown too much. Helen was always doing that. She had an eager love of companionship, a hunger for feeling that she was understood. It led her all lengths, this temptation to impetuous forays among her kind, until pride, pursuing, brought her back sedately to her pathetic state again. To Thyrza the whole scheme was out of drawing. Barton Gorse had summoned her to be a comfort to his sister, and she had responded

in her old reliance on him, knowing he would tell her how to act. She rose from her chair.

"I ought not to have come," she said. Then, with an involuntary return to the speech of her familiars, she added, in the country formula of those who end a call, "I guess I'll be going now."

Helen Davidson understood at once. She took her by both hands, and put her back into the chair.

"No, you don't, Thyrza Tennant," she said, with the old willfulness of the youth she had laid aside. "I need you twice as much if I don't have Bart. Here's your coffee, child. Mary, get a room ready. Where's your trunk? I'll send a man for it. Now when we're quite settled, you can read to me."

Thyrza stayed. Helen Davidson, in a way she had, made her at once at home and stretched a place for her. Helen, Thyrza found, was one of the people whose charm it is to spend an immense energy on trifles. They play, and the more sedate, looking on at them, are involuntarily charmed into attention by their absorption in the game. Helen had lost all chance at big games, she would have said. She was an unaffectedly sad woman, her mind fixed persistently upon a wayward past; but she put an amazing energy into the trifles that had once beguiled her. She invented idle occupations, and pursued them, not so much as if they amused her, but as if they were a species of tribute demanded by time before he would consent to pass, the semblance of activity desirable because life is framed on something of that sort. A whole week

she spent in making a garden bed, shaped like a star, and planting golden-rod in it. But it was on a rocky hillside where not even golden-rod would grow, though that left her enthusiasm unweakened when she found it out. She took three forenoons out of one week to teach a kitten a trick no kitten could do, and seemed to be exhaling her whole soul in the process. Thyrza, watching, adored her and felt dull and pale beside her.

At night they sat on the veranda, looking at the stars and talking, while the Believers, in groups on other verandas, mulled over the future state of the soul and dozed away the day's weariness. Margaret Petrie was always with them. That was not her name, she once told Thyrza brightly; she had invented it. There was no valid reason why she should not use her own name, but she liked change exceedingly. If she could alter the color of her eyes she would do it; her name, at least, fell within the limit of choice.

When Thyrza one night timidly referred to her as a Believer, she owned that she was really here because she liked the open-air life, the regular work and the mild insanity of the people.

"I shan't stay," she said. "Law, chile! another winter I may be in Washington, in my wampum, going out to dinner on the arm of Prester John."

The summer went slowly, its steps detained, it seemed, by the monotony of life, and the middle of September was come. Thyrza had written to resign her school, because she knew, when she left Helen

Davidson, she should go to Andy and be his wife. But Andy had not written to her. She had written him many times, at first lovingly, then beseechingly, and even then he did not answer. Her mother wrote, and Laura, too, to say that aunt Mary Hubbard had died and that Laura had gone home. After that, Mrs. Tennant chanced to say that Andy was there, and that they saw a good deal of him. Thyrza's hope reared its head triumphant. He went there because they belonged to her, and this was a way of being near her. She wrote him that day passionately and imploringly, and with an outspoken appeal she was agonized to make. But still he did not answer.

One soft, windy night, with far-off lightnings in the sky, the three women sat together on Helen's veranda. She had been restless all day, and now the inner storm had culminated, and they were conscious that, as she sat there, her face bent into her hands, she must be crying softly. Thyrza stirred about on futile missions, fearful of seeming too cognizant of a betraying mood; but presently Margaret Petrie ventured, with her wholesome candor, —

"Tired, ladybird?"

"Homesick," said Helen, at once, in as frank an answer. "Homesick! I've got no home—and I'm sick to death for it."

"Too bad," said Margaret Petrie, in a sweet monotony that freighted the bare words and made them sail like spice ships. "Too bad, ladybird."

Helen drew out her handkerchief and wiped her

face. She put it away decisively, as one who has resolved to cry no more.

"It's for Bart," she said. "He's my folks. You know what that word means, Thyrza. They say that in Leafy Road."

Thyrza put out a timid hand, touched her sleeve, and then withdrew it.

"He'd come," she said. "He'd come in a minute if you sent for him."

Her own heart rose in an excited yearning at even the thought of Barton Gorse, who knew so well how to make the rough places plain. He meant protection, unfaltering kindliness. He was like the sun for warmth and a tree giving shelter. He must not shield her, for she had gone into another house of life, and she must not even tell her needs to him; but it would be something if the tree grew where she could see its branches wave.

"No," said Helen, "no! He's not coming to me. I'm not going to allow it, Thyrza Tennant!" She rose, and they could fancy her slight figure quivering with the intensity of passion that moved her voice.

"What is it?" Thyrza trembled. She, too, had risen, and they faced each other.

"You're young," said Helen. Now she was shaking from head to foot. "Why, how short a time it is since I was young myself! Some might say I was young now. Why, look at me! I'm shut off from all the people I've ever known because I'm not like them any more. And it is n't only that I've killed myself.

I 'm finding out that other thing. I 've made it hard for other people because I've done—what I've done."

One of her panics of remorse had come upon her. This they sadly understood. She slipped away into the house, and they heard a closing door above. These were the attacks they had to accept, from time to time, though until now there had lacked this commentary of flaming words.

Margaret Petrie stood, head bent, listening. When the door closed she gave a sharp, quick sigh. "It's over," she said. "Maybe she 'll go to bed now, and Mary 'll tell her stories about Ireland."

Thyrza stood there, all a rigid horror. At last she found that she was speaking in a harsh and dreadful voice, and that all she could say was one word, "Stop! stop!" She repeated it many times, and then began to shake all over, and Margaret Petrie put an arm about her, and half lifted her to her feet, and together they walked away, down the steps and into the scattering woods that fringed the forest. Thyrza was crying now. "What shall I do?" she was moaning. She had forgotten Margaret Petrie. She seemed to be talking to God and His angels. "I must not tell. You must not make me tell." In those words it seemed that she had again remembered Margaret Petrie.

Margaret was standing with both arms about her now.

"Have you written to him, Thyrza?" she asked, in her firm voice.

But Thyrza could not speak. The very heart of wifely loyalty forbade her answering.

"May I write to him?" Margaret was asking, and then she cried out violently, —

"No! no! no!"

"May I go and find him?"

"No! no!" Her mind made a great leap, a willful one, it seemed, to give her pain, to Helen Davidson who had shone once like an angelic creature facing a world of wrong. Now, in the fierce realities of this moment, Helen looked like a beautiful child, not made to front anything, but to play a pretty game with life and drop it when her toys were broken. Nobody, except perhaps Margaret Petrie, seemed stronger than herself, and even to Margaret she could not speak, because of that dread vow to Andy, the unspoken vow of loyalty till death, welded as his lips touched hers.

She put Margaret away from her.

"I must go in," she said, in a muffled voice. "Let me go in."

Margaret followed her, but at the steps she put a hand on Thyrza's wrist and drew her back.

"Wait," she said. "Here, give me your other hand."

She was slipping a ring on the bare third finger.

"What is that?" asked Thyrza.

"It is my mother's wedding-ring," said Margaret Petrie.

Thyrza, with an extreme emotion which seemed to be a tempest of shame, and so unlike anything she

had felt in all her life, put her hand to it, to snatch it off. But her fingers stayed themselves, holding it.

"What makes you give it to me?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Margaret Petrie. Her voice had gathered to itself wonderful complex notes that made a harmony. "It's my mother's wedding-ring. Good-night, Thyrza."

She vanished into the dusk, and Thyrza, turning to watch her, saw her figure intermittently in the lightning as she went down the hill to her own cottage. Helen within, her emotion incredibly over, was sitting by the lamp now, a book of old French songs open before her, trying them, in a weak, melodious voice. Thyrza lifted her arms to the dark, lightning-smitten heaven and whispered, "God! God! God!"

All night she lay still, falling into abysses of sleep and then starting awake with the dread of morning and of meeting them again, Helen with that wild outcry ready to rise again to her lips and Margaret Petrie in her mastering kindliness. Thyrza made up her mind that she must go away at once, home even, to her outraged mother's house; for there she would find Andy. But in the morning everything was different. A telegram had come for her. It was from Laura. Their mother was ill and in danger. The telegram said, in its stiff simplicity, "a cold and then lung fever."

Thyrza threw things into her trunk and put on her hat and gloves. At the last minute she ran into Helen's room and found her lying in bed among her

laces; she wore the absorbed look she had when she was beguiling the time by childish occupations. She had made a little mob-cap out of her frail handkerchief, and was trying to fit it on the kitten's head, and Thyrza, seeing her thus intent upon a foolish task, felt a species of rage at her. For the moment it submerged all the worship she had conceived for a charm that was constraining by its very childishness. Helen seemed unwittingly to have failed her. She had taken a forbidden way and she should have been colossal in it, a beacon, not a frail figure stooping to gather flowers by the edge. But as Thyrza said, with a roughness born of her grief, "My mother is sick," and thrust forward the corroborating telegram, she was conscious, pace for galloping pace with her anger, of unquenchable love for Helen, her beauty, her appealingness. And almost before Helen could read the telegram and stretch out hands of sympathy and farewell, the whistle sounded from the little boat, and Thyrza had gone.

The journey back was a curious, worn duplicate of her coming. There were the same names, the unfamiliar types that had caught her eye, but they were tiresome now. She felt like an old and jaded traveler. At the junction where she had seen Andy with that lift of the heart, she alighted and, lids downcast, walked into the waiting-room and sat in an ache of memory waiting for her train. Then, too soon it seemed, she was coming into the little station at Leafy Road, not a girl as she had left it, but a woman

with a woman's dreadful secret. And there, as if God had listened to her at last, and had opened to her the gate of pardon, again stood Andy. He was beside the Peltons' farm-wagon, and she knew he had come to take her home. Thyrza ran to him, regardless of the neighbors standing by. She lifted her tear-wet eyes to his, knowing he would read their story and understand her better than he had. In a moment he would kiss her before them all, because he would be so proud to show them she belonged to him, and there would be a space, if her mother was not worse, for them to slip into the minister's and come out with the same name and all the weight of their glad promises light upon them.

But Andy had put her into the wagon, taken her trunk from the station-master with the air of one who had more strength than he knew what to do with, and tossed it in behind. Thyrza's first question was for her mother, but the sight of him made all ways so clear and plain that she felt her mother's well-being was included in her own. So she could only say his name again, and then sit still in a rapture of recognition that sad things change to joy. The day was all brilliant sky and a stillness so great that no leaf stirred. Andy, in the one glance she had dared to take of him, looked like a glorious image of life that was to be forever young and strong. The blood was in his cheeks, his eyes were dilated with an emotion she understood as the joy of seeing her. Again she had the feeling, as she always did when she was with

him, of going with the current, the great stream of being that would bear her on and not betray her. They drove into the shade of the pines, and there Andy pulled in old Bess, and made her walk. She saw how masterfully his hands held the reins, but with a tightness, she noted, not proportioned to the horse's pace. At once she translated it into the nervous tension of the moment and her coming.

"Look here," said Andy. He had meant to speak very kindly. If his voice jarred now, it was from desperation. "That last letter you wrote me—"

"Yes," she trembled.

"That wa'n't true?"

"Why, Andy!" A thousand arguments were in her answer. There was nothing she could say to him that would not be true, and there were sacred things she could not say at all, unless, as it had happened now, the need were urgent. The brute came up in Andy, the brute that fought because it was afraid, for her, for himself and for another to whom, at that instant, he was throbbingly alive.

"Look here," he repeated, "I'm a married man."

Thyrza turned to look at him with a most innocent wonder to think how he could jest. Her silence seemed to challenge him and, at the same time, he gathered courage from it.

"We were married some days ago," he said. "Laura's married me."

Suddenly she believed him, and gave a cry that sounded to her ears, as well as his, not like a human

cry at all. She lifted her clasped hands from her lap, perhaps in involuntary prayer; but while her eyes dwelt upon the freshness of his cheek, the hands refused to plead, and, still clenched, they struck him in the face. Andy did not move. He drew the horse to a halt, and they sat there together, the still day vibrating with a thousand delicate thrills, and one bird down in the ravine calling three long notes, as if by a bow upon a string. Thyrza found, as if it were a snake lurking in the ambush of the day, a wilder fear. She hurled it at him.

"Have you been honest with her? Is she married?"

He swore an angry oath.

"Of course she's married to me. Do you s'pose I'd use Laura Tennant anyways but fair?"

"It's well for you. I would have killed you."

Andy broke into tumultuous explanation, not as defending himself, but touching his allegiance to Laura.

"She's always been in my mind, Laura has, ever since I was five year old. When I went away, I kinder forgot about her, an' then I come back an' she was gone, an' you—" He stopped in sullen decency, but Thyrza cared very little about the balance of blame. Later she could think of it and try, with a bruised wonder, to fit her conception of her love to what Andy had had to offer in turn; but now she, too, thought of Laura.

"How long has she been married to you?"

"Less 'n a week," said Andy morosely. She was nearing evidence he meant to cover.

"Then it's too late," she brooded. "I can't ask her to leave you now."

"Leave me! Do you want to kill her?"

Still she had no answers for him. He seemed as alien to her as the whirlwind that had wrought destruction. It had done its work and passed on; she must repair a ragged world.

"Less than a week," she repeated. "She's been married to you less than a week!" Then in an instant a bitter wisdom seemed to be born in her, with the pain of suddenness. It made her cry, "You married her after you got my letter! You hurried her because you knew if I saw her, if she heard—" The wonder of it choked her, and she ceased.

Andy, looking straight forward between the horse's ears, was answering,—

"I wa'n't goin' to lose Laura Tennant, after I'd seen her again, an' I wa'n't goin' to—" He stopped with a tardy lenience, and Thyrza's mind pieced out the thought. He was not going to bind himself to a woman he did not love.

"Well," she said, in a dry voice, "start up the horse. We must get home."

But Andy did not move.

"Say, Thyrza," he entreated, "we're goin' out west to live. As soon as this is over I shall take her away, an' you two need n't ever meet again—"

"As soon as it's over?" she repeated in a low voice. "As soon as my mother is dead? Take me home to my mother. Take me home."

She laid her hand upon the whip, and Andy drove along. He was still offering what, it was evident, he had conceived as fitting for her.

"It 's a bad business, Thyrza. But there 's money enough. I can settle a nice sum on you."

Thyrza sat straight and still, looking before her. She heard him, but he did not seem to her a person to be answered. He was the man driving the horse. All he could do for her now was to take her home. At the gate he spoke again, with a scared timidity, strangely contrasted with his size and physical dominance.

"You ain't goin' to thresh this out with Laura? You 'd kill her. I don't care about myself — I swear I don't — but you 'll kill your sister."

Thyrza did not answer. Before he could descend, she sprang out over the wheel. And there was Laura coming down the path.

Thyrza, her eyes fixed on her as they ran to meet, noted, with a wild wonder, how beautiful she was. Laura was all calm sweetness and ripe womanhood. There were tears in her eyes, but an exaltation also, as if she had known new raptures and could translate present grief into a coming tenderness. She put out her arms, and Thyrza, running to her, laid her head on her shoulder and hid her face there. She could not kiss her. With some last sad defense of honor it came to her that, as long as she lived, she could never kiss Laura again. She might die for her, but she could not touch her lips. Laura was saying gently, —

"It 's over, dear. It 's over."

To Thyrza the words were only the dirge over her own sad state, and she was answering through her shuddering, "Yes! yes!"

Laura looked across her at Andy standing mute in fear.

"Somebody's told you!" she said.

Then Thyrza understood. She withdrew from her sister, and stood looking at her.

"Is it mother?" she asked. "Is it my mother?"

Laura stretched out her hands again, and her face quivered.

"She went in a minute, dear. She'd just been talking about you, how pleased she was to have you come, and how nice 't would be to have us all together again — and Andy, too! — and then she asked me to raise her up, and I did, and she died in a minute. But 't was easy, dear. She did n't have any pain."

Thyrza still looked at her, and then her face broke and twisted into lines appalling in its smooth young fairness. She lifted her hands to the sky and laughed out.

"I thank you," she cried. "I thank you! God, I thank you!"

"Thyrza!" called her sister. "What's that you're saying?"

That brought Thyrza's eyes back to her sister and the wild impulse passed.

"I thanked God she did n't suffer pain," she said. "Come, Laura, let's go in."

At the sill she pushed Laura before her, and turned

to shut the door, lest Andy should come, too; but that, she remembered, was a part of her insanity, and she let him follow them. Thyrza had not seen death, and when she went with Laura into their mother's room where a brisk neighbor was busy, she found incredible majesty in the still figure, and it calmed her. The worn hands brought her an anguish unspeakable. With a quick leap toward remorseful understanding, she told herself she might have saved some of their toil if she had not gone so many ways in search of sacrifice. But it seemed to her that now her only help was in her mother. They were both dead to the world. She began to see how little things avail — the sunlit day, the bird of sorrow that broods over the lintel, or the bird of joy that perches for a moment by the window and is gone. The neighbor spoke unkindly to her, with a grudging sympathy, and Thyrza knew it had been considered wrong of her to leave her mother these last weeks. She bowed her head to it.

"Where 's aunt Ellie?" she asked, with a sudden recurrence of thought to the house as it was.

Laura smiled a little in the midst of her tears.

"Gone plumming! She 's known something 's the matter. She 's missed mother."

When they had gone downstairs and Andy had driven away with the Peltons' horse, Laura drew her into the sitting-room and there brought her a cup of tea. Thyrza looked at it with the distaste she had now for everything that would help the flesh to live.

It came to her sick fancy that Andy might have bought it.

"Is that mother's tea?" she asked, making no motion toward it.

"Why, yes," said Laura, wondering. "Of course it's mother's tea."

"Out of the old black caddy?"

"Yes, Thyrza, yes."

Thyrza took it then, and drained the cup. It seemed as if her mother's hand had poured it for her.

Laura sat down and prepared to talk a little, watching her tenderly as one who must be mercifully used. She had fallen, in these few days of trouble, in a self-forgetful calm. Thyrza did not know how much of it had been the habit of her life with great-aunt Mary Hubbard; but she saw that Laura, in spite of her freshness, was no longer young. There were fine lines between her brows, a significant tracery where their mother's had grown ugly, and her eyes looked gravely out, as if they were used to finding cares. Yet even on this dark day there was anticipation in her face and a kind of wonder, as if she had met joys unprepared. When they had talked about their mother for a time, she said, with a beautiful blush,—

"Andy told you, about him and me?"

Thyrza nodded.

"I couldn't have done it," said Laura, almost as if she excused herself, "not in such a hurry. But he wouldn't take 'no.' It was the very first day of mother's being sick, and he said he must marry me

so as to be with me and be with her. Mother was real pleased."

Laura looked anything but a weak woman to be swept along by Andy's impetuous will, and Thyrza, studying her with a fixedness to understand, realized that the woman Laura had only completed a troth the child Laura had begun.

"It was pretty sudden," she forced herself to say.

"Yes," Laura answered. "I 've missed him a good deal all these years." Again she blushed sweetly all over her face, and Thyrza understood that she had been living on the memory of Andy.

Now Laura, gently reproachful of herself, because this was a house of mourning, had turned away from inapposite romance. She had at once the manner of the wife, secure in waiting love. "He 's going to stay with grandma McAdam now. He said 't was better, you and me being together. I thought 't was pretty nice of him."

Thyrza nodded, and realized that now it was possible to eat and sleep here. But though that night she put her arms about Laura, when they crept into bed together, and laid her head on her sister's shoulder in the dread certainty that, after this, there would be no near human love for her, she could not kiss her. Laura's lips, she knew again, must not be doubly sullied.

Next morning it proved that Andy had been called away on urgent business. He might not be back for a week, and it was impossible to delay, even for Mrs. Tennant's funeral. So the sisters went through their

simple rites and then, after the neighbors had gone home, sat down to confidences.

"What makes you watch me so?" Laura asked, at length.

"I don't know when I shall see you again," Thyrza answered.

"Why, you 'll be right here. The house belongs to you and me. I shan't ever touch it. Andy's got plenty, and he 'll let aunt Ellie live with us."

Thyrza was watching her with eyes that glittered.

"I understood you were going out west."

"So he says, but I guess we shan't, right off." Laura spoke with the easy assurance of one to whom everything would be conceded. "I must see to grandma McAdam, too. No, Thyrza, you stay right here, and we 'll either live along with you or go over to grandma's."

Thyrza shook her head. One of the irrevocable things now was her parting with this spot; yet she could not say so.

"Aunt Mary left us some money, didn't she?"

"Two hundred a year apiece as long as we live. I brought you yours."

"Brought it to me?"

"Yes. The will said the first payment was to be made right off after her death. There was quite a little ready money, and I was executor, and I put it in my pocket for you. Aunt Mary was queer, but she was square. She said 't was no use keeping folks lounging round a year or two, waiting for what they

were coming into. Sometimes, Thyrza, I believe she never thought she 'd treated you quite right."

Thyrza was on her feet, staring at her.

"Two hundred dollars!" she breathed. "Where is it?"

"It's in the desk drawer. You want it now? Why, you can have it."

She rose and went to the drawer, and Thyrza watched her. Laura took out a little roll, four fifty-dollar bills, and gave it to her.

Thyrza's eyes were greedy.

"Oh," she said, "I never thought such a thing could happen to me. I'm going now. I'm going to-night."

Laura was all a-quiver with hurt wonder.

"Thyrza, what's got into you?" she reproached her. It sounded like their mother. "I should think you'd want to stay till Andy comes."

"You can write to him," said Thyrza. "You can tell him you're alone. He'll come. Laura! Laura! see!"

She pointed from the window at Margaret Petrie walking up the path. She had put on what the Believers were accustomed to call the world's dress, and Thyrza, seeing how even its plainness became her, felt a timidity before her.

"Who is it?" Laura inquired, wonderingly.

"Margaret Petrie, the one I wrote about. O Laura, if she talks to you —"

But Laura, with an instant hospitality, had hastened

to the door, to let in Thyrza's friend, and Margaret Petrie was saying to her, —

"I was going through. I've left the Lake. I wanted to ask Thyrza to come with me."

Her sane composure had weight with Laura, and it seemed at once quite reasonable for Thyrza to go. It was right also, Laura owned, to hurry, though she did not learn why. The wind of their inexplicable haste persuaded her. Margaret Petrie was, at the least, a beneficent lady who would conduct Thyrza to ways of showing what was in her. To Laura the world was strange that day, so that it might well take any guise. It was a world of love and death, of long parting and renewals. That her mother had died was anguish incredible, and that Andy would any instant return to her, all warm, dominating love, was as great a marvel. She was beside herself with tenderness and grief, so smitten by them on the one side and the other that her calm nature kept its balance and made her seem unmoved by either.

Thyrza's trunk was sent to the station, and in the late afternoon she and Margaret set forth. The day was cool and sweet, and ostensibly because of that they had elected to walk, though they had agreed upon it tacitly because it was the way of solitude. Laura went with them to the gate, and when they paused there, lifted her apron and wiped her springing tears. It was the very gesture of their mother, and at once she knew it and so did Thyrza. But they could only say good-by, and Thyrza, in the saying,

laid her head upon her sister's shoulder. Then she turned to go, but halted and looked back. Her mind coursed over the years of their separation, and again she saw Laura borne unwillingly away to be educated and learn to play on great-aunt Mary's Arabella's piano. In that flash of inner vision upon things as they are, she saw that Laura was exactly as she would have been if she had not gone, a gentle soul, all pliant dignity. But if she had spent her girlhood happily at home, she might not have gained those lines between her brows. Thyrza spoke, from her ironic wonderment, —

"Laura, what's become of aunt Mary's Arabella's piano?"

"Why," said Laura, "it went to the auction room, but it didn't fetch anything. The man said 't was a cheap affair anyway, and it stood so long 't was all rusted out."

When Thyrza and Margaret Petrie were walking down the road, they heard a sound of some one singing. It came from behind the big elder-bush, and Thyrza, to whom it was a call of duty, stopped, a detaining finger on Margaret Petrie's arm. The song grew in shrill volume. It was "Mary across the wild moor," and on one of its melancholy cadences, aunt Ellie, her little pail held carefully, came out from behind the elder and slipped her hand into Thyrza's.

"She thinks she can go," said Thyrza. The tears were running down her cheeks, and she looked at Margaret Petrie in dubious trouble.

"She can," said Margaret Petrie. No problem was too stiff for her. "Come, Thyrza's little aunt. Come home with us."

The tone, the chosen words, made the invitation hospitably convincing. Aunt Ellie took up her song quite gayly, and walked with them. But half a mile further on, she left them. There was a path, between cedars, to a great yellow house. She sped up the path, and while they watched her, awaiting her return, she knocked boldly on the door, and they saw it open, and then close behind her.

"Who lives there?" Margaret Petrie asked.

Thyrza was still staring up the path. At first she could not answer. It had come upon her like a crowning wave over her own surge of grief that she did not yet know fully the extent of change sprung from her mother's death. Even aunt Ellie had somehow felt the salt wash of it, and was withdrawing herself, with pathetic logic, from the home where it had touched her. Thyrza answered slowly, in a tone of awe at all this strangeness, —

"It's the Poor Farm."

VIII

THE DISCOVERY

ETOWER was an academy seat, with mellow red lings, and greensward, and the seclusion of an lish town. Deep-toned bells spoke at hours to be rved by students and professors in residence, and ; with books were always walking in ancient paths ss the green. There was one narrow street of low ses behind the academy buildings, the bank at its falling steeply to the river, and in one of the ses Thyrza and her baby lived, and she worked ake care of him. Petrie was a beautiful baby, . her own dark coloring and a strong way of g his hands and feet. Thyrza had a little garden ıer front yard, and on the gate was tacked a d with the word "Mending" painted on it in ; letters. She had lived here a year now, sewing hard; and one day, standing at her gate for a ıent, in the early morning, wishing more students ld come to bring mercifully frayed clothes, she a woman crossing the road to her. This was a ty, plump blond, with an efflorescence of gay rs. Thyrza felt the sickening of her startled t, and the blood ran out of her cheeks. But she d still, holding her small dark head proudly, and ed straight across the road at the woman as she e. It was Rosie May Pelton, and as Thyrza waited

for her, strangely she could only think of the Rosie May that was a little girl, and of tearing up her play-house. She did not feel capable any more of destroying even a play-house. Rosie May, in her pink beauty, looked far more likely to wield the master-hand. She was calling as she came, —

"Why, Thyrza Tennant! you don't mean to say that 's you?"

"Yes," said Thyrza steadily. "It 's I. Come in, won't you?"

Rosie May was arrested by the little sign. "You don't mean to say you've set up doin' mendin'?" she cascaded, in a torrent of incredulity.

"Yes."

"Laura said you lived at Hemenway."

"I have my mail sent there."

"Well, ain't you the greatest not to let your own sister know where you live! What you s'pose I'm down here for?"

Thyrza had a vivid impression that Nemesis might have directed her, but she answered in the safe commonplace, —

"I don't know."

"Old uncle Dan'el Wright lives along here somewheres. He 's got a kind of a junk shop, I guess, — old ancient things. There 's an excursion down the river. Did n't you know it? I promised mother I'd run ahead o' the others an' hunt up uncle Dan, if I had time. Why, Thyrza Tennant, whose baby's that?"

Little Petrie had come, with slow unconscious dignity, to the door, and stood there holding by the casing. Thyrza turned and saw him, and her heart seemed to overwhelm her in a rush of compassionate love for him, and pride in his great beauty. This was only for an instant. She did not dare look at him longer, lest tears should rise to her eyes and the blood to her cheeks, and engulf her in what might look like shame. Her eyes were bent on Rosie May gravely and with no hint of deflection.

"It is my baby," she said, "my son."

"Why, Thyrza! I never knew you were married."

"No," said Thyrza, in the same grave tone. "I am not married; but this is my son."

Rosie May had blanched a little under the bloom of her cheek. She stood staring, her pretty lips vacuously parted.

"Well!" she breathed.

There were voices in the distance, and she turned with an evident relief.

"There they are, lots of folks from home. Laura 's there, too. I forgot to tell you."

"Laura!" Now Thyrza's voice broke with the anguish of terror. "Where is Laura?"

"Why, it 's an excursion an' we said we 'd go. Andy would n't, so Laura said she 'd come with me."

For a minute the world was black before Thyrza, and she caught at the fence-post to steady herself. There was one sustaining certainty to draw her

from her threatened swoon: Laura must not hear ill news of her from Rosie May. She saw the group of people coming, all in holiday dress, carrying baskets of luncheon and paper bags filled with fruit bought by the way. They were talking fast and laughing, and those in the van turned to call back gibes to the rear. It sounded as if they had formed a compact to keep a concerted pitch. Their gayety filled Thyrza with sad wonderment. It seemed amazing that men and women should behave like children in a dark world honeycombed with pitfalls to engulf them. As they neared she heard herself crying, "Laura! Laura!" and then a tall, lovely Laura detached herself from the group and came running forward. Others came, too, exclaiming that it was Thyrza Tennant; but she shut the gate in their faces and in the face of Rosie May, and drew Laura up the path. Laura, in her surprise and pleasure, only threw a gay good-by to the others and the wondering explanation that she had found her sister, and then the two were at the step, and Petrie stood there facing them. Laura stooped and drew him to her.

"No! no!" Thyrza bade her. "You must n't touch him. Come in with me." She led her sister past the little creature, and in the sitting-room they faced each other.

Laura looked at her sister with wonder and a nameless apprehension. In the delight of their meeting, she had been about to kiss her, but Thyrza looked strange and forbidding to her, and she dared not.

"The child is mine," said Thyrza, in a harsh voice. "I've just told Rosie May."

Still Laura looked at her from those wide beautiful brown eyes. Thyrza, with a sickening attention, noted every detail of her dress, the rich pin at her throat, the newness of her gloves. Laura, she saw, was prosperous, and if it could be judged from the soft cheek, the sweetly curving mouth and the untroubled eyes, she was happy. A deadly caution bade her remember to take heed and keep her so.

A shade of hurt wonder flickered into Laura's face.

"Why, Thyrza," she began, "you never told me."

It was the old question, Thyrza knew, — the one Rosie May had asked, the one the doctor and the minister had innocently implied: her marriage. She shook her head, as if she could not be swift enough in her repudiating.

"This is my child," she said. "He hasn't any father. Won't you understand? I'm not married, Laura. I never was. I never shall be."

Laura turned on her heel, with a swift whirl of her pretty skirts. She walked to the window and stood there a second. When she turned back again, her cheeks were scarlet, and rage was in her tender eyes.

"Oh, if I told him!" she cried in a choking voice, "if I told Andy, I believe he'd kill him."

"No! no! no!" Thyrza heard herself saying. "Don't tell him. He mustn't know."

"She'll tell him," said Laura hotly. "Rosie May. She'll tell every soul that ever see you. Oh!" It was

a cry all hurt and bleeding tenderness. She held her arms out. Laura was not a woman of outspoken protestations and free caresses. Now her voice had melodious calls in it, mother-notes Thyrza had never heard there. "Come here to me," she was crying. "Oh, come to me, you dear, you darlin' dear!"

In a moment she was in Thyrza's low sewing-chair, and Thyrza, at her feet, had bent her head on Laura's knee and was crying, crying, in a great wondering happiness that she could shed such tears as these. "Come up here," Laura was saying, "so 's I can kiss you."

"No! no!" Thyrza moaned. "You must n't ever ask me, Laura. I must n't ever kiss you again — nor anybody," she added in quick craftiness, lest Laura should ask why.

But Laura thought she understood how a woman to whom the semblance of love had been her undoing should swerve away from all its currency.

"You kiss him," she said coaxingly. "You kiss the little boy."

"Oh, yes!" said Thyrza, from her sad abandonment. "I kiss him. But we 're in one world, he and I. We're dead in your world, Laura. We 're in our own world together. Sometimes it 's heaven, but when he grows up, it'll be my hell."

But Laura had a simple mind, and imagery meant very little to her.

"You need n't kiss me till you feel to," she said. "I'll hug you though; I 'm going to hug him, too, in a minute. He 's sweet pretty, dear."

Thyrza sat up, there at her feet, and lifted a tear-disfigured face to look at her. She had never known Laura, she saw. Laura was a good woman, according to all the world's requirements. She was a sane, stern woman, too. She could not have walked into the bog that looked a blossomy path to Thyrza. She would have seen the oily waters underneath. Yet Laura was regarding her with clear, tender eyes, and treating her as if she were a young mother who had not stolen her child.

"I shall feel terribly if I never have any myself," she was saying. "And somehow I don't believe I shall." A shade of pathos veiled her face, deepening its tenderness. Little Petrie, in the doorway, catching at sunbeams, began to sing himself a song new as to time and language. "Now ain't that sweet?"

Thyrza looked up at her in a kind of worship. Laura, instead of herself, seemed to be motherhood, the motherhood that leans and listens for all children's crying. But Laura had left brooding over Petrie and flown back to her.

"Now you've got to come home with me," she was saying. "Not to-day, though. I'll see Andy first. But he'll be willing. He'll be glad. I'll make him."

Thyrza could put that aside for an after-moment's refusal. The first great wonder had to be fathomed now.

"Laura!" she spoke timidly. "You don't seem to treat me as if I was — different."

Laura stooped and put her two firm hands on Thyrza's shoulders.

"Darlin'," she said, "there ain't ever any blame going to be betwixt you and me. There ain't anything you could do would ever make me set by you less, nor ask you a question unless you felt to tell me. You could n't tell me, darlin', could you?"

"No!" said Thyrza. Her voice rang dreadfully against her sister's pleading. "No! no!"

"I don't mean tell me who he is. Of course I know that, dear. Of course I know! But why he should n't marry you! He liked you awfully."

Thyrza came to her feet, and stood staring at her sister. Her breath came pantingly.

"You know, Laura?" she whispered. "How can you say you know?"

"He was always terrible fond of you," Laura went on, lost now in her own yearning to set the matter right. "He never'd have given you lessons all that time, and sent you books and all. Of course he liked you, dear."

Thyrza gave a little cry.

"You must not think it, Laura, not for a minute, not a second! Why, he's the best man—" The thought of Barton Gorse, all tender chivalry, choked her, and she could not go on. He seemed to her now, using her sad knowledge of what man might be, without passions and so without cruelty.

Laura was smiling at her in a beautiful way.

"Yes, dear," she said. "You want to cover him.

I don't blame you. I should if 't was somebody I set by so — if 't was Andy, though that — " She bit the word off in quick compunction; but Thyrza knew she was about to say, — " though that could n't be." An insane impulse, the extreme of nervous emotion, swept over her. She forgot Laura whom she might kill, and forgot herself, who seemed to be already dead, and remembered only the bitter, irrevocable fact. " It is Andy ! " she wanted to cry. " It 's Andy ! your Andy ! " In a moment she passed her hand over her blurred vision and asked Laura, " Have I said anything ? "

" No," Laura was answering, in that brooding mother-voice, " not a word, dear. Nor you need n't. Only if you 'd tell me where he is now, maybe Andy and I could do something. Andy would go to the world's end after him. A man knows what to say to a man."

" Then," said Thyrza, " listen. Nobody shall go for me. Nobody shall speak for me. I speak for myself. I speak every day. I speak to God. I say, ' Help me bring up the child.' That 's all. If you set folks on my track, Laura, you 'll kill me. You 'll murder me."

She had always dominated Laura in a way, but now it was the pathos of her anguish and not her will that gave her power. Laura, too, rose and gently took her hands.

" Nobody 's going to hurt you, darlin' dear," she said. " Now le 's see the baby."

Little Petrie, having at that moment finished his

most pressing affairs with the sunshine, came staggering past in pursuit of the cat's tail, inexplicably withdrawn whenever he faltered toward it. Laura took him up and sat with him on her knee, babbling to him in a foolish language, and to Thyrza about his feet and petticoats. All that forenoon they sat, busy with the talk of happy matrons, and no word was said to break the bubble of content. As the afternoon slipped on, Laura said falteringly that perhaps she'd better not wait for the boat-folks. She might take an earlier train. Thyrza, in her turn, hesitated.

"Yes," she said, at last. "If you feel to."

Each knew what was in the other's mind. Rosie May would have told all the neighbors how she had found Thyrza Tennant, and if Thyrza and Laura were to meet their trouble with courage, they must seek it eagerly.

"Well," concluded Laura, "maybe I'd better go back with them. I'll be ready when they come along."

There were things not to be spoken: Thyrza's crying sense that she could not be permitted to carry her shame alone, but that Laura must bear some part of it with her, and Laura's longing to lift all the load she might, yet knowing Thyrza's share of it could not be lightened. When the mid-afternoon came, Laura pinned on her hat, and they put their arms about each other again, though they did not kiss. Laura had tenderly refrained from offering it. Then

she went out to the gate and waited, and Thyrza stood in the doorway, the child upon her arm, in the old attitude of motherhood. In spite of her slenderness, her steadfast pose made her majestic, and the group of people in the rear of the excursion crowd looked up at her silently, though none of them could speak. It was not because they were condemning her, but because the strangeness of it all had wrought upon them.

There was to be another encounter at the gate. A man walking rapidly and meeting the crowd had stopped to speak to Laura, but she, Thyrza could see, brushed by with what looked like a sudden involuntary scorn of him, and joined her party. He came up the path. It was Barton Gorse, and he was deeply changed from the man Thyrza knew. He looked more than the two years older, and his face had sharpened to an edge, as if he had suffered, and indeed was suffering still, and might break under it. His eyes were all a beseeching fire. She did not alter her position, though an inward terror urged her to put down the child. It seemed, for some hidden reason, that she must stand there holding her boy and waiting for Barton Gorse to come. He saw what to do, as he had always seen it for her, and took her by the elbow and turned her gently.

"Come in, Thyrza," he said. He sounded breathless. "Put him down. For a minute, only a minute. I must talk to you."

They were facing each other in the little room, as

she and Laura had stood, and Petrie, always the busiest of men, was off on another fruitless trip for the trophy of a furry tail. At first Barton could only look at her. He did not speak. Her eyes were drawn to his, and she felt how strange her face must look, in its mask of pain.

"Dear child!" said Barton Gorse. "O my dear child!"

He had never been outspoken to her before,—a little humorous, full of quaint sayings and abusive praise and an emphatic blame that was also a kind of commendation. Thyrza's lip trembled a little, but she faced him bravely, as if she offered the betrayal of her eyes to him to make of it what he might. He was continuing.

"I came home to see you. Sit down, dear child. Let me sit down. Thyrza, I found Margaret Petrie in London. She told me things."

"Yes," said Thyrza, with a miserable acquiescence. "She should not have told you."

"She had to. We talked about you and somehow —she's very sympathetic. She gets things out of you—I let her see I loved you. So she had to tell me."

Thyrza's eyes were fixed on him now in wide amazement. Shyness was over for her. The little creature in the next room was her eternal witness that girlish tremblings had gone from her forever. Barton was sitting bent in his chair, dangling his hat in his hands, and looking at it as he talked.

"You see, dear, I must have always loved you. But I knew I was no sort of a fellow to ask any woman to be kind to me—"

"You!" said Thyrza bitterly.

"I've got a nasty heart. You didn't know that. It keeps me pretty soft, a kind of a Miss Nancy, a Willy boy, you know. I'm not quoted in the market. I'm damaged goods. So when I got fond of you, I knew there was nothing for it but to tuck it away in the attic with other things, West Point and such. But when she told me that, I had to come."

"From England?" asked Thyrza, wondering. She thought very seriously of ocean voyages and the image of the rushing ship and the full sails—it had sails because the ships in poetry always had—pervaded her mind to overflowing.

"Yes. I left uncle Terry in the lurch. I didn't stop to see Helen. I came for you, dear, to ask you to marry me and go back with me, to Italy, to England. Come!"

Thyrza shook her head dumbly. The tears were standing in her eyes. He began again, in the same haste.

"You might wonder why I ask you now, when I didn't before. I haven't been able to get a new heart and I'm still a mollycoddle. Well, it's that little fellow, dear." He jerked his thumb toward the kitchen, where Petrie was declaiming over the geranium he had denuded of its bloom. "You'll have an awful time bringing him up. I could help, though I'm not much

good. It'll be better for him in every way—" he stumbled a little there, and his mouth twitched—"Say yes, dear, and come. I could n't begin to tell you how I should feel—proud, chiefly. Happy, too, but most infernally proud."

Thyrza had to adjust herself to this new idea of him before she could even consider it as something within her own radius of light. From the beginning of their acquaintance he had been a beneficent creature entirely removed from her by his knowledge and his birth. The shadow of a great roof as compared with her humble one had been over him from the first. She could never have thought of Judge Gorse's grandson in relation to herself, save as conferring benefits. But he was asking her to marry him and he was making it very much of a condescension from her. She had lost all her worldly status, and he was begging her to stoop.

"Do you mean you want to marry me—for him?" She pointed a forefinger at the other room.

The things the child had meant to Gorse came crowding back upon him now, and he could not quite assent. Since Margaret Petrie had told him this inviolate shrine had been defiled, though she could not tell the manner of it, he had been, in London and on his voyage, overwhelmed by the onslaught. The child had seemed to him only the horrible witness to what Thyrza had suffered, and if he could have heard of his death he must have thanked God. Without the child she could be rescued from her miserable lot.

With him, unless she accepted what he offered her with a quicker, stronger grasp than he believed she would, it might be hard to build up her house again. He was trying to be hopeful. But the child, this alien offspring of a man more dreadful to him because he was nameless, a monster that had come out of the dark for the slaying of innocence, — no, he could not say he wished well to the child. It must share, for the present, in his horror of the unknown father. So he answered humbly, conscious, through his miserable jealousy, that Thyrza's love for the little creature would start back aghast if he told her he felt only hatred.

"No, Thyrza. It's not for his sake. I want you for my own. But I use him for an argument, and I'll be square with him."

She sat with her hands clasped on her knees, looking through the window over the little garden at the river where academy boys were at their practice, and some on the shore, watching or training them, were calling back and forth. It was all youth and May. Barton looked at her while she sent her absent gaze so far into the possibilities of things. He could study her face and muse bitterly on his carelessness in not, in some way, seeing that his lamb was in shelter before he left her to the wolf. But who could have thought she would not be defended, if not by her austere maiden instincts, by the simple innocence of her life? That he could not pursue any great distance without the madness coming on him again, and

he put it away, to muse on the dignity and beauty of her presence under the added bloom he would not recognize of sad, yet happy motherhood. Her eyes came back to him. They were wonderfully lighted from some soft fire within.

"No," said Thyrza, "I can't ever do it."

"You don't care about me, of course. But it's possible, Thyrza, it would be best for you to marry me, even if —" He paused because there was no word gentle enough to tell her their union might be a hard task they must essay together, since she would suffer so incredibly if she were to fight alone. She was speaking bitterly.

"I guess I don't know what love is." Then her face flamed all over, and a river of angry light seemed rushing from her eyes. "But I know what hate is."

He was glad. At once he felt almost like a conqueror. If she had no allegiance to the vanished traitor, as Margaret Petrie assured him she believed, one path was clear to his own claims. She turned to him with a movement of entire self-abandonment. He felt that she was resigning herself to her confidence in him and trembled before what she might say. He could anticipate the passion of it. But she spoke with perfect self-control.

"I feel differently about — love; I feel differently about marriage."

He could understand why well enough, but it was best to say, with his old humorous smile at her, —

"We must n't think there are n't splendid marriages, because some of them go under."

"Laura is married," she answered, as if she stated some incredible fact her mind refused to grasp.

"I know. She married Andy, did n't she?"

"Yes." Thyrza had an instant then for wondering why her eyelids did not flicker even if her lips were loyal to her. She had no fear. The fate of so many worlds hung on her silence that she knew it could be kept. If Andy were there in the room, the thought that she held Laura's dear soul's happiness in her hands would have kept her cheek from blanching. But she roused herself. She even smiled at him.

"It 's so queer," she said, "to be talking to you as if we were the same age."

"I'm not so old, Thyrza," he answered, with a pang.

"No, oh, no! But you see you 've seemed different from anybody to me because you were my teacher. I never should have dreamed of —"

"Of my asking you to marry me? Well, it is a liberty. I 've tried not to, but you see I really want you very much."

His kind voice made all things possible. It was the voice of his prophesying that if she read her Virgil at that rate, she 'd have no trouble in taking her degree at any college. For an instant she wondered if it were credible that life could be smoothed like that. Could paths be made so easy by these flooding rose-leaves

that might be forgiveness, even if nothing now must be called love? Her brows contracted. She seemed to be frowning over thought.

"What is it, Thyrza?" he ventured to ask her.

She could not tell him. What was the feeling that had made her meet the other man's hideous passion with a rush of adoring acquiescence and now left her stranded on the barren shore of hatred for all emotion masking under that name? The hardest part of her daily suffering, harder even than the general contumely, was her hatred of Andy. If she could feel that she loved him, that, in spite of Laura's possession of him, she could cling to some dread allegiance, she thought she could have found one of the approaches to an austere content. But Andy had seemed a god to her, and now he was a beast. Not that, even: she was more just to him. He was a man whom nature had sent into the world with great shoulders and bright hair. Not only was her mind dead to him, but the first kiss that had seemed to her the inevitable expression of a sacred love — what was it but the easy commonplace of a creature to whom love is no more than to the beasts that perish? It all made her think warily and even scornfully of herself. If she could crown the satyr, was there satyr blood in her, too, and must she beware of all that drunken following? But she was saying to Barton, —

"You must n't come here any more."

He paled under his surprise. Then, it seeming a prudential veto, he accepted it.

"Very well," he said. "We can write, until I come to take you away for good."

"I shan't go, Barton." She had never called him by his name before. It was impossible to call him anything else now that they were man and woman fighting out a common issue.

"You won't marry me?"

"No."

He essayed a smile. It was his pathetic medicine to soften her unyieldingness.

"I 'm not so unlovable. I 'm an excellent fellow to live with."

"You must n't come," she repeated. "You must n't be—" Then she paused, with another flooding of color in her face. It was borne in upon her that she must not even tell him his name was not to be connected with hers lest others leap at Laura's certainty, and he should be despised as Laura had condemned him at the gate.

Little Petrie, absorbed in sundry mischiefs, had been very quiet, but now he came in, with great decision in his walk, to demand the creature he had a right to. He laid his hand upon Thyrza's dress, and, with the mechanical response of motherhood, she bent to take him up. Gorse rose, in irrepressible revolt.

"Put him down, Thyrza," he said, in a changed voice. "Put him down."

She obeyed sadly.

"You see," she said, "you could n't bear him."

"I could bear it if you—if he belonged to me."

"For a whole lifetime? You can't bear a minute of him."

"That's because it's not a lifetime. If I'm not to come here, not to see you again, I've a right to my minute with you. Send him away. I beg it of you."

She rose and, lifting the child, took him into the next room. There she cast about for something to keep him quiet, and finding it in one of Margaret Petrie's gayest pillows, perennially rescued from him, tossed it down before him, came back and shut the door. She looked at Gorse defiantly.

"You must n't think I could do that if you were n't going away," she said. "I love him."

His face curved into a bitter smile.

"Yes," he said, "of course you love him."

"Besides that," she continued, "he's my work—what I've got to do. I shall bring him up."

"Yes," said Gorse, "you'll lay down your life for him."

She accepted that as a matter of course.

"I came here," she explained, "because there's the academy. There are day-scholars, too, you know. I could n't ever afford to send him away to school; but if we live here—"

"Thyrza," he broke in, "I've loads of money."

She would not even hear it.

"I have two hundred a year," she went on, as if she recited a lesson. He could see how she must have gone over the sterile ground as she sat here alone and planned the campaign of her coming life.

"I had to spend it all this year." At once he knew how it had been spent. She had refused to let Margaret Petrie help her even at the time of the boy's birth, and she had furnished this little house with the remnant of the money. "But after this I can save it all. I mend for the boys. I earn a lot."

He thought of her mother sitting by the window, "tailoring," and Thyrza also thought of her.

"It's no work for you, Thyrza," he said gently. "You can teach at least. Why, you're my prize pupil. It doesn't make any difference that I've had only one. You'd be a prize pupil anywhere."

"I can't teach," she answered steadily, as of one of the things she also had desired and laid by. "I am not married and not a widow. People wouldn't let their children come to me."

He could have cursed a world that would not take the trouble to understand her; but that, he knew, was the injustice of his pitying love. All the expedients that go to the defense of hurt maidenhood thronged upon him like temptations. She could give herself, in some strange place, the title of a married woman. She could even put away the child — but that he rejected as a foul suggestion she would repudiate and him with it, if he presented it to her.

"You call yourself — " he hesitated, in the unstable hope that with strangers she might consent to wear the veil of a stolen title. Thyrza lifted her head a shade.

"Miss Tennant," she said. "That's what every-

body calls me — the boys when they bring their mending, the minister. I told him. He said 'Mrs. Tennant' for a long time."

"The minister?"

"Yes. I go to church. I thought it would be better for the boy as he grows up."

Gorse desired to know as little as possible about the boy, yet he had a yearning desire to be on familiar terms with all her ties.

"What is his name?" he asked.

"Petrie. Margaret is his godmother. He is Petrie Tennant, and I am Thyrza Tennant."

Following the unbending course of her voice, and seeing her there in that upright poise of a woman strong in health and fearlessness, it was almost possible to believe she was proud of her isolated state, and that, being different from the world, she condemned the world for its unlikeness to her. But he knew better. He knew Thyrza Tennant. She was fighting a terrible fight, and she had dared not deflect by a line from the course marked out for her. What had marked it out? chance, her own blind impulse, or the monstrous chaos of the world?

"But," she concluded, "you must n't come here any more."

It seemed his dismissal and he rose.

"I shall write to you," he temporized.

She considered a moment. Then her face quivered a little, and she looked up at him in a childlike interrogation. If it had not been for the potency of that

other presence in the next room, he could have believed that this was his child, his pupil, come to him for help.

"It seems," she faltered, "as if I might have that."

"You 're going to have it," he assured her quickly, lest she should reconsider and deny him. "We 're both going to have it."

He held out his hand, and Thyrza gave him hers.

"You 'll promise," she said earnestly, "you won't come?"

He was scanning her face sharply.

"It almost seems," he said, "as if somehow you think it 's for my sake I 'm not to come."

She would not raise that for a defense, because he could knock it down. It was for his sake, for his dignified name, but it was also for hers, a little. She had to take her path alone, her son holding by her hand; this because that other path she took, in however pathetic ignorance, led into this one.

"Is it for my sake, Thyrza?" he was repeating. "Or for yours?"

She stood still thinking.

"I know you 'll tell me the truth," he pursued. "You always tell the truth."

The blood came into her face, and her eyes turned to him in a look of flooding gratitude. He had understood her, and made her happier than he could guess.

"That 's it," she said, "the truth! Whatever it leads to, always, always I 'm going to tell the truth. I 'm going to teach the boy to tell it. Whatever comes

of it, he's to be my son and nothing else. We're going to face it, every single time."

He put the question of the boy aside. He was thinking tumultuously of himself and her.

"If I'm not to come, Thyrza," he insisted, "is it for my sake or yours?"

"You are not to come," she told him unvaryingly, and at last he answered, —

"I'm not to come yet."

Then he went away.

IX

THE WISE YOUNG JUDGE

THYRZA TENNANT, busy over the stove in her clean little kitchen, felt the approach of happiness. Several times during the past years she had heard it rushing by her to other goals, and once or twice it had even seemed for a moment as if it might pause at her own door. But it always turned off, just before reaching her, into those mysterious alleys that led elsewhere, all of them apparently defended by signs forbidding those bearing gifts to come her way. She was a beautiful woman now, because her life had been set to the measure of a simple wholesomeness. As soon as her baby came she had charged herself to learn the rules that keep the health of the body, and to maintain them, with an unbroken rigor, for her son and for herself. Strength must be his equipment and hers also, because he was inheritor of a lonely birthright, and she must be his unfailing guardian. At this time she need not have looked middle-aged at all if she had fostered her good gifts. All the attributes of a later youth were hers, none lacking but the light-heartedness that sometimes blooms in middle life. That seemed to have flown first of all out of her box of plenty.

Little Petrie was now Petrie Tennant, a graduate of the university he had stormed and conquered with

the aid of his mother's clever brain and multitudinous stitches. Thyrza herself, when he was little, had started him in his Latin. She had told him the stories of gods and heroes, and read poetry to him while she stood over the ironing-board and looked off from moment to moment from her linen polishing to the book open before her. She hardly considered what Petrie would like to be, but it seemed to her ingenuous mind, as it always had, the most desirable thing in the world to read poetry and know about gods and heroes. So she taught what she had to her son, and he accepted it with the docility that made one of the charms of his virile person. Thyrza was sure he adored his mother, if it was adoration to walk and talk and almost breathe with her, and never to weary of her. He had gone, after his graduation day, straight into journalism, and had at once achieved certain spectacular successes which were likely to recommend him for dramatic crises in all countries where events moved. Now Thyrza had money and, according to his fiat, without mending for it. But she would not as yet move from the house by the river. It seemed to her a shell she could not at once relinquish. If she tried to, there were a great many chances of her being bruised by a world she was not familiar with. It was better for her to sit down by her own window, where the near and intimate prospect had no stone or branch she did not know, and there think of her son and read books. But a discovery sprang out of these changes in the way life pulled on her: books

were not what they had been. She had a teasing sense that they were adjuncts to life, and that just outside her door was life itself. She longed timidly, not daring to tell herself she did, to meet it, not to have it spring on her from ambush as it once had, but face to face.

To-night she was waiting for Petrie to come for a brief visit, a farewell one because he was to be sent away again. But she would have three days with him, he had written. That accounted for her happiness. It was a cold night, and she was glad, because it allowed her to cook him the supper he liked, with cream toast and jam to top it. She looked at the table for the last time, and then, conscious of the rush of her anticipation, withheld for a moment by these trivial yet passionate cares, stood still, a smile on her face and her arms stretched upward, as she sometimes lifted them in unspoken messages to the power that gave her life and joy and pain. Then, before she had time to contemplate her happiness further, she heard the clang of the gate, and her man-child came dashing in, bag in hand and all the cold of the evening on his cheek. In a moment he had caught her to him with an impetuous snatch and laughed at her injunction to get warm. She was at the flood-tide of satisfaction. Petrie was a great fellow, of admirable proportions, a full flush of wholesome color, and dark eyes that laughed as Thyrza's, from which they got their hue, had never done. To her infinite pride, he looked a gentleman,

though she did not know all the triumphant evidence of that; and Petrie, because his mind was not on the shows of things, save as a means toward dominance, had never thought to tell her. But it was true that all through his college life, sharing the gayeties of his mates who by some chance had easy money, it was he who carried himself to admiration and won the civilities and cap-touchings. He had indisputably the air of inheritance, and Thyrza, looking on, sometimes wondered at him for a kind of princely stranger alighted at her door, with whom she had manifold interests but no kinship.

To-night there was every sign of kinship and the most intimate affection. He was charmed to be at home, and exerted himself to please as if he had nothing to recommend him but his good wits, and must stretch them to the utmost. But as they sat at the table and he devoured her chops and toast, she became aware that a double charm invested him: he was not only satisfied to be at home, but he was infinitely delighted with what the world was giving him. He seemed rather removed from her now in his absorption in the life of youth, and she could watch him from a distance and with entire ease, as one might regard the gambolings of a fiery colt which is safely over the fence. They could not always complete between them the perfect globe of happiness. Thyrza knew she had plucked her child out of the depths of nature, and that he and she might have been light-heartedly responsive to each other if there had been none but

nature to classify them. As it was, adore him as she might, she was not always unconstrained with him. There were unspoken things between them. One hour of revelation there had been when he came home to her, a little boy, his cheek white and his eyes blazing over the incredible horror tossed at him by a gang of lads in the street. Thyrza had laid a firm hand on his shoulder and drawn him to her. This was the bridge she had seen before her even through the shadows of her difficult way. It joined, she knew, the land they had lived in as the baby lives at its mother's breast, and that other stretch where she and her son would walk together, yet, perhaps, apart. But it must be crossed. He was her son, she told him, but he had no father whose name he could ever bear. He must be a man, never understanding this that she told him, never expecting to understand. He must be more: a gentleman. Petrie had fixed his dry eyes on her face then in an incredulity she remembered to this day, the sting and shame of it. But he had asked no questions and he had never again come home crying. He became more than ever the leader, and the boys followed him; but indubitably he was not her little son any more. He was the man-child who loved her and was dutiful to her.

To-night, when supper was over, he sat in the firelight, and Thyrza, on the other side of the hearth, watched him with an adoring admiration, the curve of his hand as he took the cigarette from his lips and let it hang for a moment at his side, all the unconscious

virility of his pose. She had moments of pride in him untainted by the secret that walked and sat with her, but never until to-night one of such entire acquiescence in his charm and power. He threw the cigarette into the fire.

"Mother!" he said.

"Yes," Thyrza answered, out of her dream of him.

But it seemed he had to think a little. At last he broke into a laugh.

"It's awfully hard," he said. "Mother, there's a girl."

Thyrza's heart constricted, and her fire of worship died. It left a dark, bare hearth.

"You don't mean you—"

"I do, mother, I do." He was laughing again in his charming way, but now quite without reserve since he had made the plunge. "She's Putty's niece."

"Professor Putnam?"

"She's with the Puttys this year. This fall she goes back to Germany. She's studying music there."

It was like a dream. This was her little boy, and he was marching steadily into that other house of life where men hold up the pillars of the world under their own roof-trees.

"Are you engaged?" she asked confusedly.

"No, dear, no. Of course not. I'm nothing to be engaged to, yet. Putty thinks great shakes of me because I have n't balked at any kind of work, but he'd be very slow about giving me his niece."

"What is her name?" Thyrza did not care very

much to know. Her name was sure to be distinguished since she was selected for the wonderful rôle of her boy's love; but questions helped to put off other interrogations that were sure to come.

"Angelica."

"That 's a beautiful name."

"She plays the fiddle," said Petrie. "She 's got an awful lot of talent. Mother!"

Something in his voice made her start and look at him, a little trembling of apprehension fluttering through her. His brows were drawn together, and he was gazing, not at her but at the fire. That frown was, she saw, not the sign of harsh emotion, but of great intentness; yet it afflicted her like a flag of trouble. He had evidently made up his mind to go on without regard to his own distaste for what he had to say.

"Mother, old Putty asked me the other day — he turned to me and asked me suddenly — whether my father was a professional man."

Thyrza often wondered whether when she felt in a certain way, with darkened vision and a crawling at the finger-tips, she had grown white, as people do when they faint. Now she must, she thought, have asked him some question to convoy him on, for he was saying, still with that frown which seemed all sombre consideration, —

"I told him my forbears were country people."

"Oh!" It was a breath of vain remonstrance. Thyrza drew it involuntarily, but it told him she con-

sidered that he had seen his opportunity and had let it pass him by.

"Do you remember," he continued, as if he had thought out beforehand exactly the way their talk would go, "my coming to you, when I was a little chap, and telling you what the fellows had been hollering after me?"

She bent her head mutely.

"Well, from that day to this nobody but old Putty has ever asked me a question I could n't laugh off. His butting in was pretty serious. I knew what it meant. He 'd been considering me with reference to her."

"Angelica?"

"Yes. He 'd talked me over with his wife. She 'd said they must be able to place me."

Thyrza was silent. She seemed turned to a listening image, regarding the bricks of the hearth. He looked at her, and drew a quick breath of irritation over the miserable circumstances where they found themselves.

"Well, mother," he urged curtly, in a brusqueness she dumbly forgave him, because it was the expression of his complete hatred of his task, "I 've got to be placed."

She was turning the situation over and over in her mind, regarding it as her mother, in the old tailoring days, might have studied a patch too problematic to mend with.

"Was any one by when he asked you?" she ventured.

"Yes. His wife — Angelica."

"Yes!" There was excuse for Petrie, she thought, in not making the brutal crudeness of his assertion before the girl he loved. It would have been like drawing a dagger on her. "But you went to him afterwards?" she besought. "You told him then?"

"No, mother, I have not told him one single word beyond what I said."

Thyrza sat unmoved in her miserable gaze at the hearth that would not help her mind, and he had to go on.

"Do you remember, when I was that little chap, how you told me to meet such questions?"

"I told you," she said, almost with an anger that it did not mean more to both of them at that instant, "to tell the truth."

"I remember it impressed me even then as your seeming to want me to lose no opportunity of telling it. Did you ever happen to know how I did meet that particular situation?"

She shook her head.

"I'll tell you. I went that night and licked every boy of them that jeered at me. Two I called out from the supper-table."

She looked up at him. The brute ferocity in his voice reminded her to see what manner of son he was. At once she became aware that he was a man as other men are, come in to her from the world of men, with all its customs and temptations in his pocket. He was speaking with a dry acridity that showed he

had exhausted all possibilities of retort, most of all the humorous. "I can't bloody old Putty's nose. But there 's got to be a suitable answer from this time forth."

Thyrza now felt herself where she had always expected to be placed: in the witness-box, accounting for her life. Strangely, she did not mind it so much as she had anticipated. Nerves that had held themselves in training all this time, tightened, as if to say, "Play upon us. We will not snap." Whether she could play harmoniously was another matter, but this consonant preparation was like the tuning of the strings. She drew herself up slightly in her chair, and forbade the hands lying in her lap to clasp each other with any sign of tension. She did not look at him again. This seemed to be not her son, but a man equipped with every attribute save mercy, ready to pronounce sentence.

"Mother," he said at last, in an impatience of appeal, "I 've got to meet the world."

"There 's only one way to meet it," said Thyrza, in the monotony of the phrase she had found long ago to cap this one of his.

"There 's a mighty lot of ways," he asserted. "We 're not 'down in Judee.'"

She had taught him the quotation and frowned slightly over it.

"There 's but one way," she repeated inflexibly. "You 've got to meet the world for what you are. You are my son, and I was never married."

Then came the horrible question that had hung over her all these years like the fatal sword.

"Why weren't you married?"

He asked it awkwardly, miserably, because he was so ashamed of asking. That question, too, had beaten itself out in his mind incessantly as one he must satisfy himself upon, one he could never ask; yet now he had put it, and his mother sat there unmoved in her austerity. She was answering,—

"I can't tell you."

"You won't tell me?"

He had gathered anger by the way, and as it had seemed to her that he was a strange judge set to weigh her actions, now he seemed so to himself.

"I won't tell you."

"Does any one know?"

She answered in the lifeless certitude of one on oath to tell the straight story of which she was gravely and miserably assured.

"I have told no one."

"Is he—alive?"

That question he dragged up from the depth of his intention, as if it were a foul thing he was afraid to look at.

"Yes."

"Do you—see him?"

Fierce, sudden jealousy possessed him, the instinct of sex-possession rising up to repudiate the man who was his foe and yet so hatefully, so incredibly near to him. This time she turned upon him in a sudden

anger he loved her for. It almost threw them back for a moment into their relation of mother and son.

"No. Of course I don't. Why should you ask me that?"

"You used to have letters," he hesitated, finding it the more difficult to speak now that she had come nearer to him in that moment of passion. "Every week. They had a foreign postmark."

She got up and went to the corner cupboard where, on the floor, was disclosed a little painted chest he had always known as locked. She took a key from the shelf above, unlocked the little chest and propped up its lid to show him neat rows of docketed letters. Several lay loosely on the top. She selected one at random, and, returning, gave it to him.

"Read it," she said, with a certain proud indifference. "You could see any of the others exactly as well. Read them all, if you like."

As he did not take the letter, she laid it on the table at his hand, and presently he drew it to him unwillingly and opened the thin large sheets. He read, frowning at first with distaste and then with attention. He came to the signature and repeated it aloud, "Barton Gorse."

"That was the chap who gave you lessons," he interpolated.

"Yes," she added. Then, irrepressibly, out of her old-fashioned vocabulary, "Not the chap—the gentleman."

But name and identity meant less to him than the

discovery in one sentence toward the end. Reading that, he came out in an explosion of surprise, —

"He asks you to marry him."

"Is it in that letter?" she inquired, out of a genuine indifference. "I did n't remember which one it was."

"He 's very incidental about it!"

"He does it two or three times a year. There 's no particular need of his paving the way." Then she regarded him with a sudden curiosity. "Is it a good letter?" she asked. She wondered how Barton Gorse would strike another man.

"Stunning! He 's got style, humor, the whole outfit. Did n't you tell me he 's a relation of Terry Updike?"

"His nephew."

"And you 've known him all these years. How long, mother?"

"Ever since I was a little girl and he taught me Latin. He has been" — her voice lingered over the words — "he is the best friend a woman ever had."

"Why does he live abroad?"

"He has a sister there. She made an unfortunate marriage, and for a long time she and her husband lived apart. Then he summoned her, but I know Barton never feels quite secure about her. He wants to be there — on call, he says."

"Are they with Updike?"

"Not Helen, not the sister. Barton is with him. He goes to his sister now and then."

"Why does n't he come home? If he asks you this—" he paused and looked again at the letter with its incidental declaration.

"I forbade him," she rejoined steadily. "He came here once years ago, when you were a baby. I told him he was never to come again."

"Why?"

"My sister had been here that day. She—" A flame like the blush of young love swept over her face. It seemed half indignation, half an intolerable anguish. "She suspected him of—oh, I can't! I can't!" She rose to her feet, stung by the sudden remembrance that the man here was her son and that their talk was hideous.

But from habit as long as his youth, his tenderness rose in response to her need of it.

"Sit down, dear," he said gravely.

She obeyed him.

"I cannot have him suspected," she said, in a voice eloquent with the promise of tears. "I could n't then. I can't now. It was better never to see him again."

"You are very fond of him, mother."

"He is the best of all creatures. I can't hurt him."

His mind had leaped back to a picture her words had given him.

"Your sister, Laura," he said. "That would be my aunt Laura."

"I suppose so."

"You suppose so, mother? Why, would n't she be?"

"I never see her," she evaded him. "I asked her not to come."

"I should like to see my aunt Laura," he mused.

"For data?" she flashed back at him. "To ask about your mother?"

He did not answer that because he knew, with the insight of a really tender heart, he need not. It was the savage response of her overwrought nerves, and it might be ignored like the distressful cry it was. He began with a softness her heart responded to by a wholesale leap toward whatever purpose he might judge desirable.

"Mother, do you know I don't half believe you're taking this right."

"This?" She looked at him now suspiciously. It seemed likely he would lure her from the narrow path full of hurts and dangers she had been walking for so many years, and set her on some table-land of content she could never leave again. He took out another cigarette and then clapped it in his case as if the issue were too serious to admit of indulgence by the way. He turned on her his sudden, irradiating smile.

"Mother," he said, "I don't believe you know in the least what kind of a world it is."

She could believe that. She waited for him to tell her. He was frowning over it as he saw it,—the great splendid friendly and unfriendly world,—and wishing he knew how to translate it to her.

"You see, it's this way," he essayed. "You've lived in a corner here like a desperate little mouse

fighting the cat. That's the world, the green-eyed world, all claws. Well, you've had a devil of a fight, but you're only used to fighting in your corner. Take you out of it and the cat would get you."

Her lip quivered with an instant's throb, and she shut her teeth upon it, as if to bid it remember what savage things might happen to it if it rebelled again.

"Your Barton Gorse, over there in England,—well, I dare say he does n't know the world any better."

She smiled a little because it seemed to her that Barton Gorse did know nearly everything.

"Oh, yes, I suppose I sound like a blatant young ass," said Petrie, responding to the smile. "But I happen to be standing neck and neck with other chaps of my age. We're booked for the race. We've got to make good. The meditative life, the life of reflection, where are they? If we met them at the theatre we should n't know them; the theatre's the only place where we do meet anything nowadays. We've got to make good."

"People do live the ideal life."

"Where do they live it? On a settled income, then. You can't live the ideal life unless you cut off coupons, too. Mother, I know!"

He had told her enough in the years of his intimate contact with men, for her also to recognize many things, however she might sit in her tower weaving meshes to veil the ugly figure of modern contest. Petrie was a favorite with men. He knew crowds of them, older than the mates he ran with. Through them and his

picture of them Thyrza was aware that modern business is a game of slay and spare not; but since her son was to be somewhere on the outskirts of it, governing intellectual issues,—unless, indeed, he should make a bold assault and dash in,—she had felt the infection of the time need not touch him at all. By a leap of her quick fancy, she saw now that he was applying the methods of the market-place to this business of the inward life. He was presently to tell her so.

"It's fight, sheer fight, mother," he was urging. "Why won't you understand it?"

"It's always been a fight," she flamed. She wanted to marshal the bright names that kept crowding upon her and use them like armies. These were the saints, the martyrs, even the poets whose hearts had broken upon the flint of "a brutal world."

"Not like this," he was saying.

"Why not like this? How is it different?"

"Once they endured—the big chaps. We don't endure. We conquer."

She was staring at him curiously, as if he were the not altogether welcome messenger from a far country bringing her news, of a sort she was obliged to heed. How could she deny that the strange country had rules of its own, proven perhaps more serviceable than her Tables of the Law? She had nourished her faith on old heroic tales. Were they only tales of legendry? Surely she must listen to him.

"Why, mother," he was continuing, in a pitying tenderness, "don't you know how it used to be about

diseases, even in your time? Girls got their hearts broken and 'went into a decline.' Now we send 'em to a sanatorium and feed 'em on milk and eggs. Somebody 'went into consumption' then, and whole families shared the taint. It was a 'visitation of God.' Now we find the germ and put our foot on it. Don't you see, you old dear? The world is n't an arena where we 're to be eaten up alive. It 's a schoolhouse where we learn. It 's a market-place where we fight."

This was a long speech and he glanced round at her brightly, rather proud of himself. She tried humbly to complete the simile.

"Yes, but, Petrie, your world has rules. Who makes your rules?"

His face flared up with the fire of youth.

"We dig 'em out of things as they are. We don't build up a scheme of things as they never can be, and stretch ourselves on Early-Christian racks to fit it. No, sir! if we want an article we plank down the cash, of one sort or another, and get it."

There was silence for a moment, and she could hear him breathing.

"Why, mother," he fulminated, "the world was n't passed to us ready-made. We 've got to shape it for ourselves."

That touched her.

"Yes! yes!" she cried, quite eagerly, "so I have thought, Petrie. If every one was just, if every one was kind —"

"Why, dear soul," said Petrie pityingly, "that 's

like earning 'a precarious living by taking in one another's washing.' It would all be milk and water, a sea of it. We should drown in it. Besides, everybody won't be just. They won't be kind. Don't you know that? The only thing for us to do is to study reactions, study causes, study results, say to ourselves, 'If I want to reach a given point what road will take me to it? What is expedient?'"

She threw out her hands. "I hate that word, Petrie," she said faintly.

"Expedient? How else do you suppose your institutions grew up, the ones you swear by? They were expedient. Now you see them bound round with brass and iron, you think they're sacred. All you see really is a kind of holy gloss over them. Don't balk at a word, mother. It's expedient to take the track that leads you somewhere."

Her heart was faint within her. Out of his knowledge, his brand-new equipment, even the power of his magnetic flesh, he seemed older than she, and infinitely wiser. It was well, she thought, to conclude the argument, to rush to her own fall, if that must be.

"Petrie," she said, "what do you want me to do?"

"That's it," he answered, in the quick relief of one who sees his adversary melting to conviction. "What shall we do?"

He was turning for her the pages of the book of nature which is not always the book of God. Was it necessary for her to read that page? She summoned back the resolutions that had looked to her like angels

once, and now, like sad-faced angels, seemed to turn their backs.

"There 's but one way—" she began faintly.

"Mother, there are a thousand ways. Life has changed, I tell you, with the conditions of it. We've got to fight with the weapons now in use. Don't expect me to go out with Excalibur when the other fellows have smokeless powder. If one of your mystics found himself in business in New York to-day, what do you think he 'd do? Well, I 'll tell you. He 'd play the game or he 'd find himself outside the ring."

Thyrza had a quick inner eye that was apt to light up at the call of phrases, and immediately it thrust her a vision of a green tranquil earth outside that ring where dirt-smeared combatants were punching one another.

"I 'm not going to be knocked out," her son was asserting, as his handsome face scowled at the fire. "I 'm going to stay in."

"You 're going to write," his mother counseled him. There was yearning suggestion in the words. It warned him that in literature he was to find the very playground and house of worship of the ideal. Expediency had not even a hollow echo there.

"I am not going to write from a cloister," said Petrie. "Europe is my preparatory dip. I 'm going to be soused all over in life, not life that 's made for me and that can be lived only according to the traditions of two centuries ago. After Europe I 'm going into the wilds, into the north, into the west, everywhere

where there's space that is n't preëmpted, and I'm going to write about it." He looked strong with the lust of life, and she saw how many miles he had traveled since she had taught him the polite learning he was regarding as a suit of clothes to wear into savagery. "After all," he was saying, "I suppose I'm going to Europe because Angelica is to be there. I need it, too, I suppose, like a language. But the language is only to use in doing bigger things. It is n't the biggest thing to learn it."

"Well," said Thyrza sharply, "what do you want me to do?"

"I want you first to move."

"Move!" She looked about her at the little old house that had become her shell, ill-fitting in some ways, as she had chafed and it had hindered her.

"There's a house at Bosworth. It's a dear. I want you to move in there as — Mrs. Tennant."

Thyrza was on her feet in an instant. She clutched the back of her chair, getting the chair between them as if he might hurt her.

"I will never —" she began — "never —"

The monstrous egotism of youth was before her, distorted like some gay mountebank from a picture, a creature that was St. Michael in every line and yet in some lights leered abominably. He was going on steadily with his conception of her future.

"At least you've given up this figment of mending." At her glance, he stopped. "You're right. God knows it has n't been a figment. You've put

me through college with your needle. But the whole atmosphere has got to be changed. We are going to be respectable."

Thyrza sat down again in her place.

"I shall never be respectable," she said, in the quietest tone. "Won't you put on a stick of wood?"

He did it with care, and the fire, obeying him, danced.

"Mother," he said, in a curious and contemplative tone, "you have n't had any fun, all your life."

"So he said," she returned, nodding toward the cupboard where the precious letters were hoarded.

"Barton Gorse?"

"One of the last times he wrote."

"He could give it to you," said Petrie tentatively.

Immediately his mother knew, with a bitter humor only now awakened, that he had caught at the shelter of Barton Gorse's name for her.

"You like him very much, mother," he said again suggestively.

Thyrza tried to answer quietly. She had grown so used to thinking of herself as a middle-aged woman, that it seemed to her absurd to make flaming declarations at the challenge of her son.

"I can't tell what I think of Barton Gorse. I don't quite know." But immediately her mind, that kept illustrating life for her in little rapid pictures, told her that he was a window looking into spaciousness and beauty, the beauty of the made and natural world. Through him she had seen the earth outside her cell.

She might not be able to set her foot on that free ground, but he never let her forget it was there.

"I suppose you wonder why I bring all this up to-night," Petrie was saying, flinging the words at her as if he had a distaste for them.

"No. It had to be."

"To-morrow Angelica is coming."

"Here!" Now she did take fright equal to his own. The unknown beloved at hand, ready to confront him and his mother with her dewy innocence, seemed a more terrible figure than abstract Justice itself in its panoply of right.

"She has heard old Dan'el — down by the wharf, you know —"

"Yes, Rosie May's uncle."

"She has heard he has a violin. She's coming to look at it. Who is Rosie May? It seems to me the most amazing lot of new names are coming out." He was looking at her half suspiciously, she thought, in her bitterness, as if any name might be a witness against her.

"She used to go to school with me. Go on."

"Well, Angelica is coming to look at the violin."

"He'd send it," said Thyrza quickly. In that one phrase she saw herself darting to a futile cover.

"No. She wrote him. He would n't. She's to be at the hotel for an hour. She asked if she might call on you."

"On me?"

"Things have gone a pretty good gait with us,

you see. She wants to know my mother! I told her you and I would call."

"No! no!" Thyrza was saying. "It's impossible."

"I begin to think so. I didn't when I proposed it. We've only to go there and make a call—"

"If you had told her the truth, Petrie! We can't, now she doesn't know it."

"I shan't tell her what you call the truth. It isn't necessary."

"Do you mean you will never tell her?"

"I shan't tell her yet. When she likes me—enough—we can tackle things together. Do you want me to deal her a blow like that now and send her off at a tangent? Could you ask it?" He felt hot with a sudden impatience to think how he was torturing her. At that instant the anger was for her because she would endure the torment when she might so simply prevent it. "It makes me furious," he said, "to see you sitting there so cold and still. You don't know what life is and you won't let anybody tell you."

The color flamed over her face at the thought that she had once run headlong toward life and it had stabbed her through the heart. All the rest of the time since the birth of her son had been like a flight from warm bewilderments. She thought of her girlhood and its pure simplicities, of its literal holding by the names of sacred things and believing they would vindicate themselves. All that long way since had been a path with one hope lighting it: that the boy might justify himself for coming sadly into the world. But

that could only be through great good fortune or the power of his own will. There had always been the feeling that, if she held her breath stoutly and worked very hard, things might not come out so badly after all. She was carrying the full cup of her secret uplifted in both hands, and it was her son who had jostled her and rudely sought to make it overflow. Now he was asking her in a way that made him still more strange to her, —

"Don't you ever want to be happy, mother? Don't you want to laugh and sing and let yourself go?"

It was like an onslaught, but she was patient under it because she knew why he must make it. This was only the surface, the foaming crest of his resentment against life as it touched them both. Thyrza felt humbly that she was indeed a poor companion. She was not the heiress of any corner of the world. She was a spendthrift. All her dower had gone before she had so much as caught the sheen of the garments it might have bought for her. And ever since, she had been on that long pilgrimage, bearing the cup of her knowledge of her life to an unknown altar — or was it to add it to some dark water of oblivion in a wood? Under the stimulus of his questions, her mind was working fast. She saw in processional beauty some of the things Barton Gorse could give her: a rich life far from here, and, she believed, a deep devotion. In that moment she knew how her spirit had been welded to his through his tender loyalty, his unfailing service. That seemed a discovery only second

in importance to the fact that her son had brought her to the bar, and that she was not answering him. He was on his feet, watch in hand with that absent and yet concentrated look with which a man plans out a hasty combination.

"It 's no use, mother," he said. "I've got to catch the train."

"The train? What train?"

"The twelve o'clock. I 'm going back to-night."

"You 're going back? Why, Petrie — Petrie — you 've come to stay."

He looked unyieldingly, not at her, but into the fire, as if he dared not see her lest his resolution flag.

"It can't be done, mother. Angelica will be here to-morrow. I must telegraph her that I was called away."

"Why must you, dear?" Her mind still failed to understand that he meant inexorably to follow out the campaign which would, he thought, lead him to his love.

"I can't see her," he repeated. "I can't take you to her. I can't bring her to you."

"Bring her. Let me go to her."

Thyrza's moved face, haggard in its appeal, seemed to tell him that he could not possibly imagine how beautiful it would be to her to see the girl he loved.

"Will you let me introduce you — décently?" he was asking, with a roughness that again told how he abhorred his task. She shook her head dumbly. "Very well, then." He snapped his watch and re-

turned it to his pocket with an air of finality. "It's no use, mother. One of us has got to yield in this thing, or — well, we simply can't play, that's all. For the present, I've got to go."

She saw him step into the entry, and heard him take down his great-coat from the nail, and knew just how he looked — how big and adequate — as he shrugged himself into it. Life, all her conscious desires and all her timid hopes of what might be, seemed to have stopped altogether. Then he came in again and, hat in hand, stood before her.

"Mother," he said, in his alluring way, when he perhaps did not consciously mean to charm but could not, by force of his real tenderness, help charming, "it's the devil for us to get to a pass like this."

She put her hands on the lapels of his coat and held them back a little, as if she meant to urge him gently to take the garment off. She was not the relinquishing silent creature she had been in her moments of endurance. Thyrza held her head up and her brown eyes looked into his. The mother and son were at last equals. She had given birth to him, but now he had escaped from her into the bounds of a man's estate. He was not to obey her any more, but neither was she to humor him.

"Petrie," she said, "I never thought it would come like this."

"What, mother?"

"Our talking this out. But it's come."

"Yes, mother, it's come. Won't you stand by me?"

She heard a great confusion of voices, reminding her, most of them, of what she had thought it would be to confront her son at the bar of his just wonders. When she had planned this moment she had pledged herself to remember all the iron calls to honor, the strings that vibrate on battlefields where men see and hear death coming. But actually all she felt was an inflexible obstinacy and despair, the anguish of knowing life was over again in this phase as completely as her girlhood's life had been over years ago —and still accepting it.

"Won't you think of me?" he was asking her again.

"I do think of you," she answered, in a rage of candor. "What else am I thinking of?"

"Will you go with me to see her, as I asked you?"

"No."

"Will you come with me and let me put you into a house of your own and say you are—my mother, Mrs. Tennant?"

"No."

"Good-by," said Petrie. "No, mother, hang it! not good-by. It's good-night." He stooped and kissed her cheek, and she dropped the detaining hands from his coat.

Then he went out, and she heard his steps quickly on the walk and the definitive clang of the gate.

X

THE GIRL

It was a morning of scudding clouds and a steely white-capped river when Thyrza got out of bed, where she had lain between a jaded sleep and waking, and told herself, incredulous yet convinced, that her son had left her. The counter-shot to this, if she chose to be comforted, was that it was only for a time; but the inner self that is wiser than all reason knew better. The act itself had been one of those leaps into a path that leads away and away from what has been. But no grieved and brooding wonder could throw her out of the regular habits of her life. They had been too laboriously fixed. This morning she prepared her breakfast as scrupulously as if she had the will to eat it, and set out the simple food on a white cloth. When Thyrza's son had first left her for college, she had reminded herself that it is easy to be careless if one lives alone, and that Petrie, returning, must find her as fastidious as he had left her. A hint to her trained mind, meekly used to discipline, was enough. It had obeyed her through all the ups and downs of appetite and no appetite, and kept fresh damask and orderly dishes the insignia of her desire to do well. Now, after she had got the breakfast, she looked at it in an unfriendly though not an interested mood, and cleared it away. At ten o'clock, with all

her tasks done, she sat down by the window, her hands on her lap, and looked out at the garden fluttering back a chilled and meagre greeting to the autumn sky. It was possible to work about the house, but not to sew, because sewing was no longer an act in itself. It was a chain of poignant memories. "I have sewed him through college," she said aloud. The task was done, and he had gone prosperously away from her, and the needle was as dreadful to her as the rapier that, though it has defended our dearest, has drawn heart's blood in the thrust.

In this dull middle of the forenoon, when her thoughts ran back and found no resting-place, because the past seemed cruel to her, and panted forward and found no hope, she saw a woman, a slight creature, coming up the garden walk. Thyrza rose and went to the door, and there she found one of the smallest, most complete of ladies, and very young. Yet though the girl lacked height, she gave a curious impression of dignity. Perhaps it was her way of holding her head, all smooth golden hair. Her cheeks were richly blooming and her thick eyebrows seemed to be lines of golden down. The eyebrows looked to Thyrza quite the most beautiful thing the girl had, of all her splendor of equipment. And blue eyes, wonderful blue eyes — she had those, too. This little princess of a lady was dressed in dark blue, smoothly fitted, with a great deal of knowing lappet and braid, and a white collar above which her blond neck rose exquisitely; her small hands were clad in dashing gloves

with gauntlets, in a day when gauntlets were not worn. Thyrza did not know the girl had them made for her because she absurdly liked them, but they did look to her unusual and she stared at them. The girl's face, she saw at once, was very quick to respond to feeling, and something had distressed it. The forehead, not made for worry and evidently having always escaped it, wrinkled a little over the golden brows. She spoke at once, in a quick way, as if she could give herself no time to begin differently, and in a delightful voice.

"Are you Petrie Tennant's mother?"

Wonder fell from Thyrza and gave place to a most happy certainty. She, too, spoke impetuously.

"You must be Angelica."

The girl was at once inside and the door had closed behind her, and, because it seemed to them at the time the most natural thing to do, they were clinging to each other and crying, though in a different way. Thyrza had broken down as a repressed creature can break when immutable necessity drives, and the girl had only given way for a moment to a gust of feeling. But with them both it was the recoil from the assault of harsh discovery. The girl came first to her composure. She pulled off her gauntleted glove and turned her back on Thyrza, looking out of the window, stamping her neat foot once or twice, as if she hated emotion, and wiping her eyes ostentatiously, to give Thyrza color and support for the great sobs that still came welling up. Thyrza began to walk the floor,

crying as she went, and once finding herself near the door that led into her bedroom, she escaped through it and there recovered her decent composure. When she came back, quivering but master of herself again, Angelica turned upon her and smiled irresistibly.

"There!" said she. "Are you over it? So am I. Are n't we the silliest?"

She had put on a wonderful smile that was a little open, a little candid of display for every-day uses; but it was genuine. It perhaps suggested the footlights, but Thyrza, who did not know that and had seen few beauties bow their recognition to a delighted house, only felt that she was all loveliness and a sunshine she longed to share. They sat down together, though not at a distance, each by a window, where Thyrza's callers were accustomed to sit in reference to her, but facing each other, knee to knee. The girl had willed it so, and immediately she took Thyrza's hands and held them and looked at them. Thyrza thought she was gazing curiously though kindly, and she did not mind; but she was not prepared to have the girl kiss one hand and then the other. Angelica had noted the worn nails (Thyrza had done some washing and ironing for boys, in hard years, but that was never told, lest Petrie should be ashamed) and the pricked forefinger. They were slender hands. They were meant, by intention of nature, the artificer, to be beautiful, but Thyrza had thrown them into the melting-pot of a great need, and they had come out misshapen.

"You dear!" said Angelica, as she kissed them. She began to talk rapidly, with little inquiring glances and dramatic indicated gesture. "Has he spoken about me?"

"Yes," said Thyrza.

She felt suddenly quite happy, with old sorrows washed out of her by her tears and this friendly creature beginning to talk about Petrie.

"What did he say?"

"He is very fond of you." This was the timid vesture of an overwhelming fact. Thyrza was a person who somehow could not mention the word love. She felt as if she had offended it. Yet in shy moments she believed it existed somewhere, though it had mysteriously appeared only to jeer at her.

The girl was speaking again.

"I didn't mean to come here. You know he telegraphed."

"Yes."

"He had promised to let me meet you. But he was called away?"

It was not exactly a question, yet Thyrza felt challenged and interrogated. It seemed to her that the girl had a clear right to see things exactly as they were, and that they must both walk delicately amid this coil of circumstance.

"Did you mean to come to see me," the girl asked, "if he hadn't been called away?"

"I wanted to come," Thyrza ventured safely.

The girl seemed to put that aside with a little mo-

tion of her head, as if it did not carry half the weight she wanted and not indeed enough to count at all. But she was immersed in a warmer feeling, one, it seemed, that did not affect Thyrza immediately at all.

"I came down here," she said, "to see the violin."

"Did you see it?" Thyrza ventured, timidly welcoming this as a safer issue.

She dismissed that with another movement of her head.

"It 's been painted. It 's no good. A beauty murdered, that 's my impression. He 's an awful old man."

"He 's uncle to a girl I used to go to school with," said Thyrza, as if that accounted for anything. "Her name was Rosie May."

"He 's senile, he 's half doting. I asked him where you lived. He told me — oh!"

It was a cry that wondered how he dared to tell her that thing because she was used to being held very precious, and men were in the habit of considering what she would like to hear. Thyrza was looking at her with serious eyes.

"I know," she said quite simply. "He told you Petrie had no father."

The girl broke down now and unaffectedly let the tears run over her face.

"I had to come then," she said. "I had to see you."

Thyrza was regarding her from an exquisite state

of dignity. She looked as a queen might wish to look on coronation day.

"Why, it's true, my dear," she said. "It's all true."

The girl's tempestuous face told where her thoughts were, with the old man.

"The brute!" she cried.

Thyrza's mind had run back a longer distance.

"He's Rosie May's uncle," she repeated. "I tore up Rosie May's play-house."

The girl put Thyrza's hands together and left them on her knee, with a little friendly clasp. The blood had run back into her cheeks. She looked all passion and demanding fury.

"But will you explain to me," she asked, with something superb in her small presence, "why it was left for a dreadful old man to tell me this?"

Thyrza was looking at her still with that meek dignity. She put the question she had asked Petrie the night before.

"Are you engaged?"

"Engaged!" cried the girl, with another stamp of her mandatory foot; "why, he loves me. We have n't talked about being engaged. He adores me."

"Yes," said Thyrza. She thought back to the night before. "Petrie adores you."

"He said all the things men say," the girl was going on, and immediately Thyrza saw that many men had given her page and verse of the things that might be said. "I thought he had n't a secret — he

had n't a thought he did n't beg to share with me. And now — and now — " With a quick recoil from the rush of her own emotion she saw how hideous it was to stand there battling upon the shield of the other woman's unmoved endurance. " Oh ! " she cried, " I 'm a cruel little beast ! "

Thyrza had put herself out of the question.

" You think Petrie deceived you ? " she temporized.

" Did n't he deceive me ? " the girl threw back.

" Yes. But think — think what it meant to him. He has n't anything behind his own record to offer you, anything untarnished, anything clean — " She was forsaking her own post, and going over to Petrie's to fight for him, no matter what the arguments were, so they might win.

" Has n't anything to offer me ! " flashed the girl. " Has n't he you ? "

A flush swept over Thyrza's face, and unconsciously she put her head up in the old habit of her girlhood. There was something in the girl, some simple reckless daring, that bade her take courage and assert herself.

" You see I believe in you down to the ground," Angelica was saying. " I 'd only to see you to do that. And I had to see you."

Thyrza, breathing fast, approached her.

" What shall I tell you ? " she asked.

" About yourself ? Nothing."

" What the old man told you was true. I am not married. I have not seen Petrie's father since my

son's birth. If I am fortunate, I shall die without seeing him."

The girl, a hand lifted, was warning her.

"Don't go on. Why do you want to rip yourself to pieces and tear these things out for me? I don't want them. Darling lady, give me a kiss and stop your poor heart's bleeding."

Nobody, out of books, had ever told Thyrza that the slow throb and pain she had felt for so many years seemed to them also like the dropping of the heart's blood. That was what she called it to herself.

"But," Angelica went on, with a renewed dash, "why did Petrie lie to me?"

"I told you—"

"I know! I know!" she conceded vehemently. "But he can't lie to me. He shan't. I won't be lied to." She seemed then, by one of her bewildering turns that were like the flight of wings, to put her own emotions suddenly aside, to conduct Thyrza alone to a bright open field. Thyrza at once felt the lens turned on her, supplementing a kindly eye which was nevertheless about to force her to account for herself in a way she never had before. The world, the one full of blooms and birds and rivers flowing vocally, was asking her all at once what she had done for it. Had she joined any of its gay responses, or had she let fall the curtain of her heart so that light could hardly filter in and no light could get out? The silver interrogation made her feel like a rock in a barren pasture. She had been still; she had done

no more. The girl's lips followed the query her eyes began.

"You dear," she said, in a soft reproachful wonder, "you 've never had any fun." Thyrza had done crying, but her inward response to that was a threatening of tears. "You 've never had any pleasures, any of the things that just keep the rest of us alive."

That accounted for her, Thyrza thought. When she saw the girl, when she breathed her air, she became achingly aware of a life she herself had never known, all fleeting experience, some of it in foreign lands, some scarcely remembered because it had been so multitudinous and swift, of perfumes and idle hours and the languid sense that life is rich enough to afford a million other things besides to-day's.

"You 've had nothing, nothing," Angelica was insisting.

"I have had my son."

"Yes, but you 've sat here and worked for him. You have n't let life gallop away with you."

Thyrza's instant response within herself was that she trusted the hobby-horse of habit more than the chariot of the sun. Angelica knew at once what she would have said.

"That 's precisely it," she concurred, as if it were commonplace to understand perfectly. "Of course you 're afraid. What would be the sense of being galloped away with, if there was n't some fear to go with it? What have you wanted most?"

Thyrza smiled at her little old self.

"Once I wanted a piano."

"Did you get it?"

"No."

"Do you want it now?"

Thyrza looked down at her worn hands with all their muscles tightened.

"No," she said.

"I'll bet you don't!" Angelica looked as if she could cry again those angry tears. "You don't want anything, but to see that long-legged loon of yours, that well-fed, groomed, shaven young prince of the blood get all he wants. But he won't, not without working for it. I tell you that."

Thyrza said the audacious thing that came into her mind.

"Won't he get you?"

Angelica, her hands on her knee, waited a long time, thinking. At last, speaking, she seemed to give every word the weight it had gained while she fashioned it.

"There is just one way for him to get me. You will not tell him I have been here. You'll promise me that before I leave. I shall go back to my uncle's and sail for France as fast as I can sail. I shall leave Petrie no word. I shall send him no address. He will come and find me."

Thyrza's answer amazed and pleased her.

"Yes. That will be right."

Angelica's eyes gave bright response.

"Good! I did n't expect that of you. I thought you 'd say, 'Give him his sugar-plum.'"

"No." Thyrza shook her head. "I have n't always given him the sugar-plums he cried for."

"The better for him. He never 'll get them from me. I don't believe in romantic love, my lady. You might as well understand that now." She looked as if she did believe in rebellion for the sake of rebelling, a thousand warring feats that make life hot and variable. Thyrza learned suddenly then that there might be complicated young women of a vast experience of whom her secluded life had given her no understanding. "Now do you believe in it — romantic love?" The girl was challenging her with a sudden tardy sense of the question's cruelty.

"Romantic love!" Thyrza repeated the words, awed and timid at the sound of them. What did they recall to her but the memory of a throng of nebulous emotions, all belief, all ecstasy, her response to life when it played upon her as the winds play on the pine? Now she would have said it was being pathetically lost to a sense of all realities.

"I 'll tell you what you need," Angelica was saying. She laughed now as if neither of them had an apprehension of a care. "You need a girl chum. You be my chum, Petrie's mother. Will you?"

Thyrza was bewildered by the sound of it.

"I don't believe I ever did have an intimate friend," she said. "There 's my sister. But we were separated early. No. I never had an intimate friend."

"I'll be your intimate friend. You let me."

"But I'm Petrie's mother."

"Petrie be hanged. No! no! Don't look like that. He shan't be hanged. But Petrie's got to do a lot of pilgrimage before we can be absolutely sure of his not being hanged. We won't think of him. We can't afford to. Women folks go on adventures now. They don't stop to mull over men all the time. Besides, we like him too much."

"You do care about him!" cried Thyrza, in a transport.

"Did you doubt it?" The laughing lips were set and the eyes brooded.

Thyrza immediately thought she had discovered something.

"I guess," she said gently, "you do believe in love."

Angelica was looking straight at her now, and there dwelt a soft brightness in her eyes.

"You've found me out, haven't you?" she said, very simply. "Well, chummie, don't you tell. I don't say much about it myself." She threw that issue aside, as if it could not be touched on again in a very long time. "Come abroad with me."

Thyrza smiled and shook her head.

"I've lots of money," said the girl.

"Oh!" said Thyrza. "Then that's another reason why he mustn't have you, not till he has money of his own."

Angelica nodded her head with an equal wisdom.

"I suppose that's true," said she. "I never thought of it before. You see how necessary a mother is. I feel lots older than he, older than you, really. If you are his mother, I shall have to be his grandmother. Poor Petrie! he'll have to toe the line. It's very dull, though, is n't it?"

"What is dull?"

Her opulent eyes, rich in such surprises of mirth and other changefulness, glowed and then almost shut with excess of being pleased.

"Dull to stop to think of things. Dull not to say, 'Why, yes, Petrie, here's money. Dip both hands in. Come to Paris, come to Vienna.'" She drew her face into a charming seriousness. "But we must consider the good of the child."

"Are you going abroad to study?" asked Thyrza.

"Yes. To study, to play. I play the fiddle, you know. I play in public and folks bow down and kiss my instep. If I had my fiddle here I could play the heart out of your breast. That's what the London paper said I did."

"Are you going alone?"

"Yes, so to speak. With my maid. It makes auntie and uncle —"

"The Putnams?"

"Yes."

"Petrie spoke of them."

"It makes them shudder. But they can't help it." Again she drew her face into a sad oval. "Auntie thinks I shall be spoken to."

"I should think you would be," said Thyrza, with an involuntary gush of admiration.

"Why, I am! That 's what I live for. I speak myself, to stewards and things. I have hosts of friends among what auntie calls the lower classes. 'Those people' she 's named them! What should I know about life, if I stayed shut up in a bureau drawer? That 's where auntie lives, swathed in rolls upon rolls of jeweler's cotton. But the moths get at her. I can tell her that. She 's terribly riddled."

"I have two friends living abroad," said Thyrza. She had an impulse to tell something, anything. In this warm atmosphere of ready approval she felt the petals of her heart uncurling. She had told God a great many things in all these years, some of them wild with anguish and some timidly thankful that He had dealt no worse with her; but it would be an exquisite thing, like putting a tired head on a kind bosom, to give some of her secrets to a warm, soft hand.

"Man or woman?" Angelica asked. One of her charms, one that you felt would wear and was not fleetingly exhibited for the sake of earning praise, was an immediate and strict attention to what you were saying.

"One is a woman," Thyrza answered. "Her name is Margaret Petrie. She lives in Florence."

Angelica saw that Margaret Petrie was not the actual pivot of the confidence.

"Petrie was named for her," she guessed. "I 'm glad you told me. Anything about the child — we

must n't forget he is our joint-stock baby — the most inconsiderable things — add to my data for dealing with him. Does she write to you?"

"Oh, yes, but not regularly. That would n't be like her. But they 're splendid letters. And she never changes."

"She 's older than you are?"

"Ever so much. I never saw anybody so gay. She says Florence is the paradise of the middle-aged woman."

"Who 's the other friend?" asked Angelica. "That 's a man."

"What things you know!" Thyrza laughed for pleasure in the audacious wisdom of her.

"I don't know. I guess. So it is a man."

Thyrza began and told the story of Barton Gorse: how he had taught her when she was a little girl and he was a youth, and how he had gone abroad to live with his uncle, and how he wrote her twice a week. "That 's his last letter," she said, pointing to a thick envelope on the table. "I have n't read it. Petrie read one of his letters last night. He liked it."

"Silly, to make over your letters to Petrie! I shan't give him mine." Then she became aware that there was more in this than met the first apprehension, and began guessing again. "I dare say Petrie fumed about him. I 'm watching you, chummie. Tell the truth. Did he fume?"

"I had never told him much about Barton Gorse," Thyrza temporized. "Yes, I let him see the letter."

"Petrie 's a jealous dog. He 'll have to get over it — partially. That will be a delicate matter. He must get over the manifestation, not the disposition. The disposition is delicious. It 's a spur, to violets and devotion. Dear lady, Barton Gorse is in love with you."

"He asks me to marry him," said Thyrza, quite simply. "He has asked me a great many times."

"Then why in the world don't you do it? You could live abroad, and go to Florence and see your Margaret Petrie, and have spasms in the National Gallery, and confront Mona Lisa on her own ground, and read Taine. That 's what you 'd love, blessed child."

All this Thyrza could see was not what Angelica herself would love in an old-world pageant, but it had no touch of satire.

"I could n't have gone abroad, even if I married," she said. "I had Petrie."

"But you have n't Petrie now. He 's going to wander. And anyway you could leave him with me — with his grandmother."

Thyrza looked her friend in the eyes.

"You would n't have me marry a man if I did n't — " she hesitated.

"Love him? No, by my good right hand and my fiddle-bow. But let 's see, dear daughter, what love is."

"In the first place it is n't for women as old as I, women with grown-up sons. And it is n't for women just like me."

Angelica was reflecting.

"I guess," she said at length, "you'd better go abroad with me. You'd better let me get you into a velvet gown and a picture-hat, and drive in the Bois behind a pair, and go to a battle of flowers, and pelt unknown Frenchmen with roses, and be spoken to in the rue de la Paix because you're so handsome, and have to ask a gendarme to walk a block with you to protect you. What I shall have to do, chummie, is to pump the breath of life into you."

Thyrza had to laugh.

"But it's not my kind of life," she demurred. "I'm just a dull country-woman that, when she was a girl, expected a good many things that never came true."

"You're very handsome." Angelica was still staring at her with a knowing eye. "A picture-hat would turn you into a raving beauty. I'll bet you wear a bonnet."

"Yes."

"I'll bet it's got strings."

"Narrow ones," said Thyrza humbly.

"And you take off the flowers every two years and make the milliner give them another cant, and you call it trimmed. Auntie does. She wears a bunch of lilac. It was gathered in Paris when she was a girl, and she believes in it as she does in the Louvre."

There was something in Thyrza's face, a mute protest that could not make itself vocal. Angelica saw it, and her tongue was holden.

"O you darling! Yes, I know," she cried then, beside herself with shame. "You've furnished Petrie's rooms

at college, and you'd have worn a coal-scuttle to do it. But that's past and gone, and you've got to have a picture-hat."

Thyrza was willing enough to leave this issue, exciting as it sounded.

"I haven't asked you to take off your hat," she said. "But I wish you'd stay."

"Petrie won't be back?"

"No."

"Then I'll stay to luncheon. Afterwards I'll telephone auntie I'm starting for New York; so if Petrie calls there he'll be thrown off the track."

To Thyrza, it was criminal to say you were going to New York and then sit down cosily on the spot and eat a luncheon untinged by bitterness. If she had, in stress of temptation, said she was going to New York, she would have felt obliged to go, or run confessing her lie all over the place. But she had a bewildered conviction that this little creature, as sparkling as a bird in a spring suit of sheeny feathers, and as good and harmless, she was sure, had a code of different rules in her pockets, — rules personally applied for and furnished under the restriction that they must not be loaned. Angelica was still studying her points with a frank intentness.

"You see," she announced, "the lines in your face all help it. They give you a kind of haggard beauty, — Oh, you're splendid!"

Thyrza had to recognize that she was fluttered by this reversal of her own verdicts. It was exciting, as

if she had years ago put aside a dull ornament, and a clever hand had taken it out and held it to the light and declared that some, at least, could see it flash.

"I must get dinner," she said, with an accompanying practical wonder as to what dish was good enough. "You take your things off."

Angelica was pulling out a hat-pin. She did even that with a grace Thyrza found enchanting.

"I 'll stay all night if you 'll ask me."

"Why!" said Thyrza. She stopped, with her tablecloth half out of the drawer. "Seems as if nothing so pleasant ever did happen in this world."

"You could lend me a nightie. You 're sure Petrie won't come?"

Thyrza stopped on her way to the dresser.

"Why," she breathed, "there 's Petrie now!"

Angelica made one light bound to the other side of the room, the farthest from the window.

"Where?"

"Coming down the street."

"I must go."

"You 'll meet him. Oh, stay and meet him here!"

"He 's not to know I 've been here. You 're not to tell him. Promise."

"I did promise. But, oh!—"

"Is n't there a back door?"

"Yes."

"And a back street?" She was through the door in the speaking, standing on the step, pinning her hat again, the keen air from the river blowing more

color into her flushed face. Thyrza, shaken by an anticipatory pang at the losing of her, was sorry for Petrie with a double passion.

"There 's a path along the river." She was pointing it out. "After a while take the street at your right. But it 's cruel to him —"

"No, it is n't," said the girl. "Step down here where I can kiss you. It 's no more cruel than you were when you took him out of petticoats. Petrie 's got to grow up. Good-by, you blessed child. You shall have the picture-hat, and we 'll *flâner* yet in Paris. Good-by, you dear."

Thyrza, the touch of the fresh lips warm on hers, stood watching the little figure running along the river-path like a child scudding there for fun. As she sometimes did when she was alone, — for she had an unchangeable devotion to purity of language in public, — she returned to her mother's colloquial tongue, when she was moved. "My soul!" she whispered. "My soul!" Then she heard the front door shut, and Petrie calling her. She ran in, lest he should find her there and see also the flying figure on the river-path. Petrie met her in his rapid walk to the back of the house, and caught her in his arms.

"Mother," he said. "I 'm an awful bounder!"

There had been times when Thyrza would have luxuriated in protestations and soft remorse because they were signs of love, but her high heart was wholly now with the little figure fleeing along the river and the probability of its being seen. She seemed, in the

hour of her talk with Angelica, to have transferred her devotion from Petrie to Petrie and his love. She hugged Petrie, not so much in the warmth he had expected but with a canny desire to hold him while Angelica got away.

"You were a good boy to come back," she said at last, releasing him.

He was throwing off his coat. He stopped with it ready to be deposited, a quick flush in his face.

"Who's been here?" he said. "I smell violets. I smelled them the minute I came in."

Thyrza drew out the table and began to spread the cloth.

"There aren't any violets here, unless you've brought them with you."

She, too, flushed. A daring light came into her eyes. She knew in that moment that, if the crucial question came, if he said to her in plain words, "Has Angelica been here?" she should answer "no." The girl had given her a sense that certain things must be done; it was necessary to do them and take your moral chances. Thyrza had not felt her blood so move for years. But he had laid down his coat and his hat with it, as if his time were limited. His air of a casual visitor impressed her, and she was about to ask him if he had not come for his two days, when he spoke out bluntly: —

"Only a bite for me. I'm off this afternoon. Tomorrow I shall be in New York, and sail for the Philippines."

She had started up the fire with little sticks, but this arrested her.

"You've changed your plans," she hurried.

"They've been changed for me. I'm told off to be sent there to do some special work. I'd only time to see you and do one thing more. I've got to see her, too."

"Angelica." She did not say it interrogatively, but as if Angelica were one of the accepted facts.

He nodded.

"I posted down here and went to old Wright's. She had been there and gone. I shall find her at the Putnams' this afternoon."

Would he find her? Thyrza hoped so, with an aching heart, because, having seen her bright beauty, she knew how desolate it would be not to see it shining, if one expected it.

"I've wired her," he pursued.

Then he would not find her. He was giving her time to be away, in New York on her flight to Europe, or in a dozen hiding-places her swift progresses must have left ready for her. Now Thyrza's loyalty shifted, and went over to her son. She longed, with a beating heart, to urge him to go now, before the girl had time to flee him. It was as if they two, she and Petrie, were mercifully pursuing some loved animal of the hearth for benevolent purposes, and she could put her hand on Petrie's arm and whisper, "See! there in that bush." And then the little creature of the wild impulses and the domestic heart would be caught and

stroked into acquiescence, and presently she would be warm by the fireside, having only her wild dash for liberty to dream of. But a keen intelligence held her back. She had a saving consciousness that Angelica and Petrie were different beings from herself, and that they must make the laws of their own world. She had nurtured him and trained his baby mind. But the world was another world from the one she had known in her own youth and that, in her days of retirement here, she had never been able to forget. She saw it in the boys who came to her to do their little tasks. Youth now, all youth, seemed to be what only luxurious youth born to money and pleasures had been in her day. Young conquerors conquered early. Even the market-place was full of Alexanders. To be young was an inheritance of itself. They must play their own game, these two inheritors.

"When are you coming back?" she safely asked.

"From the Philippines?"

"Yes."

"When my job is done. It 's a big thing, mother. And I want the dough."

"The dough?"

Thyrza frowned, but only with perplexity. She had never got used to a young college man who had access to the classics, dealing in the slang of the street. Petrie laughed out, as he always did at her innocences, but it was absently.

"Money, old lady. I want money."

"Of course." She craved it for him, more, even,

she half guessed, than he wanted it himself. For he in the conquering way of youth, which had somehow lost the old-fashioned ideals, like a worn wallet full of foreign gold that had no daily value now but only a vague preciousness, might feel that it was not beneath him to take a dowered bride. "I want you to have it," she went on. "I want you to be able to have money — and a home." Over the last word she trembled. It seemed as if it might bring down on her the clatter of the discussion that had parted them yesterday, as if one dragged manacles from a shelf. But he answered very seriously and gently.

"I want it, too, marmie. We 'll see what I can do."

They talked no more of anything that could recall their difference or suggest Angelica. Once he laughed out, at the table, and spoke shamefacedly, as if on the brink of a confidence too tender to be shared. "Funny, how I smelled violets! But I suppose I 'm always doing it. I 'm always thinking — " He paused there abruptly, and Thyrza knew he was always thinking of Angelica, with the ache of love, and wondering what breeze might waft him news of her. She considered it in wonder, and then put it aside, as she often did intimate and moving things, to muse over when she should be alone. It was amazing to her that two young and beautiful creatures like these should be loving each other with no bar to thinking each other as fine as they were. To her bruised and aching sense, what is called love had been, when she dared define it, a state in which the eyes were dazzled. The plain

could glitter for that one masquerade, and beauty, in her pathetic turn, could find her image in the beast. But these two were really the prince and princess. Their dream was a reality.

"What you thinking about, old lady?" asked Petrie. They had risen from the table and she stood for a moment, her hand on her chair, looking at him. Thyrza shook her head, smiling, and judging that the tears in her eyes were not heavy enough to be wiped away. If she left them in a pool, he might not notice them. Petrie came round the table and, his arm over her shoulder as if she had been another boy, bent his face to her.

"You're the dearest old girl," he said. His voice was broken with what he felt and his impatience at expressing it. "I would n't hurt you for a million dollars."

"Go and get her, Petrie," she uttered hastily, for all answer. "Love her, be true to her, make her marry you."

He selected the tiny phrase that had cost her most to say.

"Be true to her? Bet your life, mother. But there's no temptation—" he laughed, triumphantly, "not to be true to such a girl."

"Maybe not," said Thyrza humbly. "But you be true."

Then he gave her what they used to call the cinnamon bear's hug, when he was about two feet high and used to sit in her lap. It was the nicest hug of all, and

so it was called cinnamon. The black bear's hug was ponderous and slow, the grizzly's came when you had been out skating and were impatient to do a lot of things, and mother wanted you to hug her before you could even start doing them. But the cinnamon bear's hug belonged to the twilighty times when you were sleepy, a little thoughtful over the selection of bed-time stories, and soaked through with the certainty that mother was the fount of blessings.

He went away, and Thyrza watched him, and at the top of the street he turned and waved his hand to her. "Good-by!" she said under her breath. She and Petrie together had left one more of the countries of life for other territory. This was a special farewell, not because he was going to the Philippines, but because she was giving him to Angelica. She went back into the room that looked doubly lonely since they had both gone out of it, and yet was different somehow for having framed Angelica and her breath of violets, and found the one friendliest thing in it, — the letter lying on the table. She touched it with an endearing hand. "Old friend!" her heart said, and her lips were smiling. She sat down and read it through, and found at the end a little sentence made of quiet words. Barton Gorse was coming home now, to marry her.

XI

A KNIGHT PEERLESS

Barton Gorse came, following on his letter as fast as ship could sail. Thyrza had had a vivid day of it, with some premonition that any hour might bring him; she set her house in order until it was exquisitely clean. It seemed like a little shrine scoured to the grain in years of tidiness and then washed anew. There were delicate things baked and set aside because she did not know his appetite; but they were the dishes Petrie loved. She was not tired, though she had fled over the rooms with all her mother's old dispatch; some radiant household vision raced before her, touching with its guiding finger, its shining wings, the spots where tasks were to be done. Thyrza was in that most ecstatic state of all life, the one that is the manor-house of youth, but belongs to middle age only in brief expectancies when it strays by chance into some flower-garden of fortune. It was the sense of the pleasant which is also the new. "Can it be so?" Thyrza kept asking herself as she swept and dusted her house that already had a difference, as if it looked for some one. "Can Barton Gorse be coming? Can he be coming to say he loves me and shall I believe I love him, too?"

But some one else came first. The expressman arrived with a great package, and when he had gone

Thyrza opened it with some doubt that it was for her, and found what seemed Angelica's answer to all the trembling questions her mind had put. It was a wonderful hat, all wavy curves, softened again by a glorious feather that bent and rippled like a tasseled tree; and there was a fur cloak that seemed to Thyrza even as splendid as it was warm. She could not know it was priceless, or that Angelica had delayed sending it until Petrie was well out of the country because he, too, would discern its value, and that would lead to questions and his guessing their small secret. Thyrza, with an instinct untarnished by lack of use, pulled her soft hair looser until it lent her a new shadowy grace, and pinned on the hat. One added incredible beauty she noted, almost transcending the hat itself: the pin that came with it, sparkling and bizarre. Could she be the misguided soul that had worn bonnet-strings? Then she slipped into her cloak, and partly because the room seemed small for such magnificence, and partly because the cloak was warm, she opened her door and went out, and paced up and down the garden path.

Thyrza loved fur. She stroked it with her bare hand, and thought of the time when she was a little girl and took out one of the top bureau-drawers to stretch down her little marauding arm and feel the Christmas presents in the locked drawer below. There had been something soft, and she had confided to Laura that it must be a muff; perhaps it was two muffs, though Thyrza with her sense of privilege then

thought, if it were one, it would be for her, and Laura would like that just as well. But it had turned into woolly mittens carded into fluff that agonized your teeth when you pulled off a mitten in mad haste while the other hand was busy. Now the muff had come true in a glorious apotheosis. She had fur enough to clothe her from head to foot, a shining borrowed skin. She stroked it again, looked down at the hem of her calico dress and her worn shoe, and laughed, and then put up her head in fitting pride to walk and preen herself; and turning on her path she saw Barton Gorse at the gate.

When her eyes encountered him her heart gave a great throb of romantic memory. It was not Barton Gorse standing there, it seemed, but his uncle, the iron-gray cavalier with the splendid mustache and hat and cloak she had seen and loved when she was a child. Thyrza really did for a moment think it was Terry Updike, and it was easy to forget, in the illusion of it, that time had passed for him as for her, and that as she was no longer a child so he was an old man ending his days in England, while the papers chronicled his least opinion, as if his state were that of privilege and all his conclusions about the long path he had trodden counted weightily. Terry Updike was one of those whose monuments are builded in their lifetime. The grain he had sown had been made into bread for him to eat.

Barton Gorse opened the gate and came through while she stood there staring at him in her arrested

pose. He got both her hands out of the fur cloak, and held them.

"Darling child," he said, "it must be you. Tell me it is, before I call you names again."

He had changed, indeed. With middle age he had not lost, he had gained something — a brusque dignity of manhood that had been lacking in the discouragement of his earlier years. Thyrza stared at him, speechless. He shook her hands a little, in a fond impatience.

"Thyrza," he insisted, "are you Thyrza?"

"Yes," she managed to say.

"Then come in where I can make love to you. I'm going to do it at once, I've been such a fool to wait."

She let him lead her in as if she were a child caught in truancy. In the kitchen he kept her hand, and stood looking at her.

"Why," said he, "you're so handsome I don't know what to do. I didn't know you were going to be anything like this. I've thought of you as my good, dutiful, conjugation-adoring, declension-loving Thyrza."

Then Thyrza thought at once of the fur and feathers, and wished she had not put them on, because she must take them off and he would see she was no such affair in her calico dress. She drew away her hand and got her hat-pin out, and slipped off hat and cloak in haste. Then she stood before him in her calico, and thought of beggar-maids and how she had not even youth to recommend her.

"I don't feel as if they were mine," she said, throwing a look at the rich garment on a chair. "They were given to me. They came this morning. I felt I 'd got to put them on."

"Given to you?" He repeated it absently, his eyes scanning her with their old kindliness, though the incredulous admiration had gone out of them. There was a difference, she saw, but somehow it had not made him the less kind.

"A young lady gave them to me, the young lady Petrie is going to marry."

"Where is Petrie?" He spoke interestedly, as if Petrie were only some one who might come in to interrupt them at any moment and must be reckoned on.

"In the Philippines."

"That 's good. That 's capital of him. I shall marry you before he comes back."

"Won't you sit down?" asked Thyrza, with a fluttering primness.

"Not just yet. I want you to stand here to be looked at. I like you best so, in your common dress. This is the way I 've thought of you. Will he like it?"

"What?"

"Will Petrie like my marrying you?"

She could not answer without making it conditional.

"He *would* like it."

"Good boy! Then he really 's fond of you. He wants you to be happy."

Petrie did want her to be happy, she was sure, but he wanted first, in his hot-headed rush toward

his own completed fate, to see her placed on some accepted plane.

"Sit down," she said again. "I shall have to get dinner pretty soon."

Barton Gorse released her hand and laughed.

"Are n't you cunning, Thyrza!" he interjected, the note of admiration in his voice making it apparent that he meant the word in the significance of its common application to children or furry animals. "You said that just like your mother. I set great store by the old times, don't you?"

Thyrza now, with her mind running ahead and arranging dinner, was more at ease. Barton helped her put the table out, and she spread the cloth. Then he wandered about from window to window, if one may wander in so small a space, and watched her deftness. When she stopped at the stove for a boiling of something or other to be accomplished, he began, from no sense of the fitness of place or time, but with a directness which she felt to be agitating in the extreme: —

"The fact is, Thyrza, I 've come over to make love to you, and I 'm going to do it for all I 'm worth."

"You don't know whether you like me after all these years." Thyrza felt her face crimsoning in the kettle's heat.

"Yes, I do. The thing I don't know is whether you 're in the way of liking me. But I intend to carry the citadel by assault and marry you off before you get your breath; then, when we 're back in England,

you can make up your mind whether you 're likely to repent at leisure."

"Back in England?"

"Yes, we 're going back there. It would n't be fair to leave uncle Terry now he 's got so used to me. But you 'll like him. You 'll love him. And you 'll meet such big guns of literature that you 'll have to keep declining and conjugating into the night, to maintain your self-respect."

"How is your uncle?"

"He is a shadow, a beautiful shadow, of what he was, — a wasted old man lying there and forgetting names of people, but remembering reams of poetry and saying them over to himself when he can't sleep. I believe he never sleeps. He seems to be half in paradise now. You see he believes in paradise because he 's a poet. I have to, in courtesy to him."

"You can't like me," said Thyrza involuntarily. "I don't talk like that."

"Of course you don't, darling child. You never could. But I do like you. I just love you. I 've loved you so much all these years that nobody else has been able even to rent your place. Sometimes I've been so bored by it I could have slapped your hands for it. But I 've liked you. Oh, I 've liked you!"

Thyrza had the pang she remembered when she saw grown-up Petrie first come walking home from school with a girl.

"Have people tried?" she faltered.

"Tried?"

"To —rent my place?"

His eyes spilled over with laughter.

"Oh, I put up a sign when you turned me off: 'To rent. Unfurnished.' But the minute I saw somebody coming that way, I snatched down the sign and ran down cellar and hid in the coal-hole."

She should never be able to keep pace with him, she thought. It was better to consider him a brilliant visitor, and have done with him, not a cozy inmate come to stay. She thought how wonderfully he would get on with Angelica, and how their thoughts would fence and parry and then race together for the fun of racing. Even their speech had something alike, a swift, changing flow as if, although the currents were apart, they were running over identical slopes and hindrances. Did that betoken an inner likeness, and was it a secret of her own sudden cleaving to Angelica? Or did it spring from their fostering tenderness for her, their wish to reassure and fortify her own simpler mind? As if he read her in Angelica's own way, he was answering with an absurd composure.

"I'm not like this all the time. I'm chattering to make you think I'm brilliant, you do love brilliancy so. Partly too to keep us both from crying."

"You're so different."

"Am I, Thyrza? Well, I'm old, I know."

"No, not that. You're splendid. You look like him."

"Uncle Terry? Some of them say so. I don't believe I really do, any to hurt, because he's the

splendidest ever. But I'm not really changed, Thyrza, though I talk so fast. Look at me and see."

She did look as involuntarily as she had obeyed him those years ago when he had bade her hunt up something in the lexicon. There was the old kind smile. He too seemed to have remembered just which one it was, and put it on to reassure her. Her smile came to meet it.

"No," said Thyrza, "I guess you have n't changed."

When dinner was ready, they sat down to it and talked commonplace things. She heard how Margaret Petrie was holding a salon in Florence and was the crown of the English set there, and how Helen Davidson was still at Spa and always would be, adoring her beast of a husband.

"But it 's no use pitying her," said Barton, showing his first gloom. "She likes him. She says he is n't a beast now, and that wipes out the past."

"Oh, I 'm glad she 's got him back," said Thyrza.

"Are you? Well, she is, too. She trumped up some kind of a theory years ago about his soul, and it seems to have justified her. If he 's got one, she 's saved it — if it 's worth saving."

"You don't seem to doubt about uncle Terry's soul!"

"Oh, no! You can see that right through the hide, like an angel in a crystal jar. No! no! it would be a bold man that would deny a soul to uncle Terry."

When dinner was over, she put away the food, and then, as she took her place at the sink to wash the

dishes, Barton, with a perfectly commonplace assurance, took a towel from the line and presented himself to wipe them for her. He glanced out of the window.

"How low the sun is!"

"It's dusk early," said Thyrza.

"I must get to my love-making. I'll show you all my cards. This is how I happened to come over. One night, not three weeks ago, uncle Terry began talking to me about his life. It was more than half rhapsody, a kind of supreme confidence to himself."

Thyrza paused with a dish in air, his words seemed to her so grand and beautiful. She would never get over her worship of the intellectual forms of things, and words would always seem to her something sacred.

"He dwelt chiefly," said Gorse, without heeding her, "on what he had foregone, and what he had made others miss through lack of hope, not believing overwhelmingly in the higher powers, — the unseen powers, — trusting the soul of things. And he is a poet! If he had that to remember, what had I?"

"Go on," Thyrza breathed. She was afraid to have him stop before he had inducted her into those mysteries that might make her own way plain.

"When I had listened to him for as long as he would speak, I remembered you. I'm always remembering you. I thought maybe if I had n't accepted your decision as I did, we should both have been happier. For you know, Thyrza, I believe, I fully believe,

not so much that you're fond of me as that you're prepared to be. I feel somehow as if all this letter-writing of ours — it's been tiresome sometimes, but it's been necessary and honest — I believe all life has been preparing us to love each other like sixty."

"I believe that, too!"

She had said it before she realized what the words would mean to him. They came out of the inner crystalline well of her life, as if she had dipped her hand in and brought it up sparkling with clear, cool drops.

"Then, by George!" said Barton, "that's all there is to it. I need n't make love any more. We'll just get married and sail for England. Petrie's on his feet. If he is n't, I'll put him there."

"No! no!"

"Yes!"

"I can't let you marry me."

"Let me! You put it as if it would be disaster for me. What do you mean, Thyrza?"

She looked beyond him out of the window, where a squad of boys in flannels were running, elbows set and faces hot, down to the river. They looked to her like the youth she had never really had in its insolent bravery, because misfortune came so soon; every step of their race reminded her jeeringly that she had not their excuse of the unreasoning force of blood. She had one weapon in her armory: prudence. Let her use it. There was one thing she could not let him suffer. He should not make the burden of her tarnished fame his

own, even though they went among strangers and only two or three who knew her past suspected he was carrying it.

"Well, then," he was saying, in a baffled way, "I've got to go back to my love-making."

Thyrza laughed out and he laughed with her. If he was endowed with such power to conjure away her blue devils, where was it to lead her? He would simply go fluting through the world, and she would have to follow.

"That's right, Thyrza." He was commending her. "Laugh a little. Let's have some fun before we die. It won't be long before the dusk is falling. The dusk! That's what you said. I love that way of putting it. Well, we're going to be old pretty soon, I sooner than you, ever so much sooner. The dusk will be falling. Let's kindle a good fire on the hearth, and light the lamp, and sit there like Darby and Joan till one of us nods off. Ain't I just the poet, Thyrza? But you do it with me."

He put out his hand, and Thyrza laid hers in it. At the same time she shook her head.

"No, Barton, no."

"You like me, don't you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"If we were thirty now, — well, one of us thirty and the other twenty, — wouldn't you perhaps say you loved me?"

She nodded, keeping her clear eyes fixed on him. There was never a great issue when Thyrza doubted

that she must tell the truth. She had had her temptation when she realized, that other day, how in the mad whirl of Angelica's commands she meant to lie heartily; but Thyrza had decided, when the hour was past, that she was a craven to think it and it would have done no good. All her undying hope had been in drawing straight lines.

"You're afraid of the word, then," Barton was persuading her gently. "We won't use it. We'll just say you're going to marry me, and come to England."

Two tears ran down Thyrza's cheeks. Angelica seemed to have opened to her the luxurious art of crying. She shook her head. Barton looked at her a long time. There were things he might have asked, not because he needed to know them but because they would have enlightened him toward persuading her. Was the other man living, and did she, in her fastidious honor, believe it would be a wrong to either of them to make herself secure? Was she still expiating the fatal deed of her girlhood? He could not ask. There was something in his knowledge of her that told him how bruised a heart she carried, and not even to bring about her ultimate happiness could he hurt it further. He even wondered if he took her to his breast and ardently called upon her blood to help him, whether he might not carry the citadel by assault. But he had always believed that she had suffered some such wrong as an unthinking child might have endured, and old nerves in her might be waiting to shriek again at the demand of earthly passion. So he dropped her

hand and rose, and she stood also, and they faced each other.

"I'll go, Thyrza."

That seemed a deprivation greater than she could bear.

"For good?" she faltered.

He smiled, hopefully for himself and most tenderly for her.

"No, darlingest. Just back to town to see about my luggage — I rushed here from the boat — and get it to Longford, to the old house. I shall be down again to-morrow. I've got to, to attend to my love-making."

She shook her head again, but he could see that he was leaving her not unhappy. When he was at the door he halted, came back and took her hands, to kiss them in a fervent haste.

"Good-by," he said. "Good-by, darlingest."

She watched him from the window, and just as he was about to round the corner, she fled out into the yard and waved to him. So he came back. They met in the garden-path, and he held her hands again, such hope in his eyes as she had never seen. But her own eyes were brimming.

"What is it, Thyrza?" he was asking tenderly. "This is n't because I 'm going? That would mean — why, it makes me dizzy to think what splendors it would mean."

She was paying no particular attention to what he said, but looking him in the face with a puzzling intentness.

"You sure you will come back?" she asked simply.

"Sure? Am I sure the sun will rise?"

Then she took her hands away from him and laughed a little.

"It seems as if there was something outside us," she said, "waiting for us. It seems to — threaten us."

"Where, dear?"

She looked about at the quiet little street, the sky, and over her shoulder at the river. Through a sudden willfulness of the day the sun was out brilliantly for one of the last moments of his shining.

"There," she said, with a vague motion of her hand. It indicated the mystery of even the tamed nature lying wide about them.

Barton laughed.

"You 're nervous, child," he said. "We 're both strung up to the snapping-point. No wonder you see him."

"Who, Barton?" she whispered, out of her fear that seemed the greater because she was standing in the open. "Who is it I see?"

"Pan, child. I suppose he 's in village streets sometimes. It is n't always a thicket. I 'm coming in, dear, until you 're quieted."

"And lose the train?"

"No, that 's the train I've got to take. But I've a good five minutes, if I sprint a little."

Then she really laughed light-heartedly, and the day smiled out of its ominous brightness. Pan had passed. She even heard the rustle of his going, and

looked about over her shoulder at the river, where a flying cloud cast its shadow, that was yet not the shadow of a cloud but of the moving god.

"No," she said. "He 's gone. You need n't sprint. Good-night. Good-by, and come to-morrow."

Barton looked down at her gravely for a moment, as if he questioned whether it would be better to kiss and wait or to go and come again. But there was in her something which still called for delicate delays, and as he had planned his campaign, so he would follow it.

"Then," he said, "to-morrow."

He was gone, and she turned away lest she encounter the bad omen of watching him out of sight. Indoors she sank down in the chair where he had sat, and raised her hands to her lips and kissed them. She was not going to marry him, but she was warm to the heart.

The next morning she rose with the feeling of good fortune, if a pleasurable excitement meant the good. It was one of those mornings of early autumn when the frost is on the grass in a clouded silver, and the rims of all the leaves are outlined in glittering white. The river looked cold but blue, and it was smooth. It looked to her, who had seen so many boys rushing there in a gay abandon, like a playground of youth. Before her work was done, even, she went out to get a breath of morning air and run along the path Angelica had taken, as if the way the steps of youth had hastened might bring her nearer the end youth

craved. For the first time since the murder of her hope she longed for joy, personal joy that led nowhere that could be mapped or predicted, but only into the morning. She knew what train Barton must take, if he meant to come again to her to-day; she must be back in time to finish getting the house in order for him. The post had come, she found; there was a letter under her door. It was in Laura's unformed half-childish hand, and seemed another omen. Laura did not write often, because she had no habit of the pen, and there was little to say except that they were "well as usual." Thyrza read the letter. As she opened it, it had even seemed to her, in her glow of hope and sense of the morning, that Laura, like Angelica and like Barton, had come to tell her all things were to be made new. It would not have surprised her greatly, in this dazed acceptance of miracle, to find that Laura had written her that the old things had passed away; they had been a dream even, or a pageant, to teach them both what life might be. But in that case her son out conquering the world, and Angelica who only came to her through her son, must be figures in a dream. So it was with a vague feeling of high possibilities that she read the letter. It was very short. Laura was "sort of discouraged." She wanted Thyrza. It was dull as death in Leafy Road, but they could have a nice little visit together, and though Andy was away a good deal, at work, it would do him good, too, when he and Thyrza got wonted. Would she come?

Instantly the old guardians of Thyrza's life seemed

to come flying, hooded, mantled, their faces hidden, indeterminate shapes of gloom that she had conceived when she used to read the translations of Greek plays Barton Gorse had sent her — the Furies, she had learned to call them. They were in the room, they had settled in the darkest corner, still veiled but implacable, commanding her never to forget. She must keep the bonds of the punishment she had meted out to herself, because they also had decreed it, and she had read the lines of it in their inexorable air. She could not go to Laura, however Laura wanted her. She must not enter Andy's house.

Then, as she stood there wondering how she could refuse her sister, the other messenger came. In an instant the boy had gone, and she was reading the yellow slip with its fatal words. There had been an accident. Barton Gorse was hurt. He was at his house at Longford.

Thyrza had not made many journeys, and she prepared for this one in such haste as if the conventional ways of traveling were unknown to her. Over her clean morning calico she slipped the fur cloak — not because it was beautiful, but because it seemed like Angelica's hand on hers — and pinned on the feather hat. With her old gloves and her purse in her hand, she locked the door behind her, — not on the Furies, because they went with her, to remind her of Laura's letter that must be answered by wire, — and got her train. And by and by, when the morning was spent and a rainy sky obscured the promise of the dawn, she was

in Longford and had telegraphed Laura she could not come, — she put in a merciful "not yet," in spite of the Furies; and she had inquired her way to Barton's house, and then, when she set off half-running and stopped to get her breath and run again, it came to her that she might have had a carriage, but that she was too used to the efficacy of her own feet to consider it.

The old Gorse house was well back from the street, and the street was the best in Longford, a shaded highway with elms as old as the founding of the town. It was a great cheerful yellow house, with coverts of shrubbery and rowan trees in front. Their red berries were spilled all over the path, and Thyrza, with a sick feeling, stepped across the brown grass to avoid them, they were so like blood. The door was opened to her before she could knock. Katie stood there, Katie who had been elderly once in Leafy Road and was now old. She, too, was moved, Thyrza saw, at the thought of old times running like a river of destiny, into this sad present, and after she had motioned Thyrza to the stairway, she sat down in the great hall chair and put her apron to her face. Thyrza went on and turned to the front room where there was a flickering fire on the hearth and the furnishings of an olden time, and where Barton Gorse lay in the great four-poster, the coverings drawn to his chin, his eyes upon the door. He was very pale, so pale that it seemed to her as if the blood had drained out of him; and immediately her heart contracted, and forbade her to wonder how

else it was with him beyond the life in those glowing eyes. A man was with him, but he went away at once, evidently by prearrangement, and Thyrza threw off her cloak and hat, and sat down by the bed, in her dress a humble attendant but in the anguish of her face the nearest a man could have. Barton was smiling at her in the old way, though the smile had a twitch in it. She could see that he had schooled himself for her coming, and that the smile was to help her through what they both had to bear. He began at once.

"You hurried, did n't you? You were a dear. The chances are I live some hours. To-morrow morning, the doctor sets. That gives us quite a while to say things."

The call brought its quick response. She felt the hand of necessity laid upon her nerves and looked at him in turn as smilingly. Then she bent and kissed him.

"I wish you had stayed with me," she said.

"So do I, dear. But we must n't wish."

It came to her in the flash of thoughts hurrying past her, that, if one were to do it, she should wish that she had taken him warmly to her heart, when he had asked for love, and told him there was a worldful of it for him. But that, too, she put aside for the time when he should be gone.

He was smiling at her whimsically, a little irregular smile.

"It was Pan, was n't it," he said, "yesterday in the garden?"

The heathen gods seemed as far away from her as the time when they were visible to men. All the books she had read or wanted to read, the languages she had longed to know, seemed like obsolete furniture she was tossing into an abyss to give place for the homely furnishing where life could live. And all about her, in a narrowing circle, were intelligences knit in with her childish life, affections awakened after loss to sustain her at this moment when life and death were so near each other that she could almost see what made them seem so different. Her mother, Laura, Andy even — they were pouring sustenance into her failing powers from their long well-wishing to her. But because he spoke of Pan, she nodded at him in understanding, and he said from a curiosity not all whim, —

"Did he come to warn us, do you think?"

"Maybe so," said Thyrza, still humoring him.

"I often wonder whether it 's hostile to us," he said dreamily, "the great force outside. It tries so hard to kill us off. Well, never mind. There 's something back of it that is n't hostile." Then he seemed to be recalling himself to a grip on the framework of things, and presently he had succeeded. "I want to tell you what I 've done," he said. "Last night I made my will. You 'll have this house and a lot of money. Now would n't it be nice to marry me? I only made the will in case you would n't — you 're such an obstinate little conjugating pig."

"Just as you please," said Thyrza.

She hoped she might have one of his hands to

hold, but she dared not ask whether they, too, were hurt.

"No, not just as I please. Would you rather? What would be easier for you staying here alone?"

She felt the need of saying things clearly and calmly, though in haste.

"If you married me, Barton, they would always say you were Petrie's father and made me reparation. I could n't bear to have them think that of you."

"Was that why you put me off?"

"Yes."

"You were a goose, Thyrza."

"I could n't have them despising you."

"But I guess you would have married me in the end. I could have made you."

"Oh, yes, I should have married you."

The hooded creatures away off in some obscurity outside the room, shook their heads at her, but she did not mind them. She had broken her bonds of expiation and remorse.

"I 'll talk a little now, and then rest," he was saying. "We must say all we can. I have an idea they 'll deaden me at the last. So it would be easier for you not to marry me?"

"It would be easier not to have them think you are — not what you are."

"Well, then, let it be as it is."

"Do you care?"

"No, darlingest. It won't make any difference where I 'm going, nor to either of us after you come."

"Shall I go to you?" She asked it like a child, with her old child earnestness over moods and tenses, careful to have it all just right, and believing in his power to tell her.

"Yes. It has come to me quite suddenly, to be certain of it. It came to uncle Terry, but I thought it was because he was a poet. But I see now it was because he 'd got to the threshold where the door stands open. You can't open the door till you get to the sill. Yes. There 's another country."

At that moment her own case seemed to her harder than his. She forgot Petrie and that she loved him, and it seemed as if it would be a long time possibly before she, too, could find herself at the threshold and touch the door and know she was going to see Barton Gorse. He guessed or knew what she was thinking.

"You've had a pretty hard life, Thyrza, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes. I've had a hard life."

"But does it seem long?"

She thought back over the years. No, it had not seemed long.

"Well, no more will it again. And you'll find me wanting you." He lay resting for a while and then said musingly, "I thought there was some kind of a bee in your bonnet about thinking you mustn't marry me—for that reason, you know, the reason you gave. I even thought you mightn't want to take a legacy from me, so I left a little one to Laura and

a little one to Margaret Petrie, — I guess Margaret will understand and make hers over to you, — but you 've got the lion's share."

Presently, after a time, when the man had come in and given him something and he had rested with closed eyes, he looked up, in a little flash of humor, and said, "I don't want a doleful dying. They 'll give me morphia. Then I shall say all sorts of queer things, — I have a suspicion I did last night, while they were getting me into shape, — but you just remember that is n't me. It irritates me exceedingly to think we may be doleful. Let 's not."

The day passed very quickly to Thyrza, because she never knew what time it was. All the clocks and watches might have stopped for her because she seemed to be living in one great moment that might be called time and might be eternity. The doctor came, and Barton bade him remember — speaking lightly in a way that need not break the heart because it was entirely sincere — that since he could not be plucked back to life, he might be allowed to squander his hour as he pleased.

"It 's mine," he said. "Thyrza" (he had not mentioned her formally to any one) — "Thyrza is going to stay with me and I'm going to talk it away."

Then it was dusk, and the night had come outside, and there was a shaded lamp in the room. Thyrza had been called down to dinner, and Katie served her tenderly, and when she came back she was aware that the doctor and the attendant had made themselves

comfortable in the next room, ready at a sound, and that she was to watch beside the dying.

"Now," said Barton, "let's talk." He, too, had evidently been prepared by some sustaining potion. His eyes were brighter, though with a disturbing brilliancy, and his cheeks were flushed. "Thyrza, you seem to love me."

She tried to think of the greatest words there were.

"Oh, wonderfully! eternally!"

"That's good. We should have been happy. Don't you think you can kill all your ghosts and be happy now?"

"I shall try," she said.

"That's a good girl. Are any of your ghosts alive yet, dear?"

"They were," she said truthfully, "until you came. I guess you banished them."

"I'm glad. I've often thought I should like to understand your life, Thyrza. Could I?"

It sounded wistful. She suddenly felt that since he must so soon be done with earth, it would bring him nearer to her, it would keep him warmer, to consider earthly things.

"It won't make you angry?" she hesitated.

"No. I'm past that. But I should like to understand."

She began then, and very directly told him the story of her meeting Andy and all that followed. He lay with his brilliant gaze fixed on her, and her own clear eyes never faltered from it. If Thyrza had all

her life been telling the truth, it appeared to her a preparation, and not too arduous a one, for telling it now.

"Poor child!" he said. "So you thought it was love."

All the calmness possible to humanity seemed to have descended upon her that she might keep him undisturbed.

"Yes," she said, smiling. "I know better now."

"The earth is pretty cruel to us. She wants to be peopled, the poor earth. She has to be cruel."

Thyrza went on and told him Laura had sent for her, and that this was hard to meet, because she could never enter Andy's house. Barton's lids had dropped, but they came open here.

"Why, child," he said, "you must n't do that."

"Stay away? How could I go? There's Laura."

"You must n't let the past put manacles on you like that. Perhaps the poor devil wants to see you and go shriven, when he goes. There are paths above the paths."

That she did not surely understand, but it came to her that he meant there was something loftier than her rigid groove.

"Is n't it funny," he said, "now I've said that, I can see paths along green terraces, one higher than the other, and you can vault from one up to the other. But I must n't say 'higher' to you, or you'll think I mean scaling some rocky peak and planting banners there. No! no! only do the thing that's warmest and

most kind. — You'll write to uncle Terry, won't you?" he added, after a moment's floating off. "It's a dirty trick, my deserting him this way, after he'd got used to me. You tell him I said so. He knew why I came — to see a woman. Tell him the woman loved me, you loved me, Thyrza. He'll understand."

And once again he roused to say, —

"And you won't kiss Laura because it would be a Judas-kiss? Silly! silly! Everything's silly but — what was I saying? — oh, but being kind! Remember!"

It seemed as if the night were slipping fast because the doctor had set that as the bound to Barton's life. Presently he looked at her with different eyes.

"I rather guess they'll have to do something for me," he said; and at the rustle of her dress in rising the two men were there. Then after a time she was alone with him again, and he said, "Is n't it strange, what we miss when we listen to our coward wills? I had a bad heart. I let it keep me out of a hundred things that were life — life. And I'm not dying of it, after all. You let the earth stupefy you, Thyrza, and then you shut yourself up in a prison because you were determined to serve out your sentence. You and I might have been living in a garden all these years."

Thyrza laid her cheek on the pillow beside his.

"It is n't that you tried to be too good, darlingest," he counseled her. "It's only that you did n't believe enough — I did n't either — in the thing that makes over and renews. It's all life — life — life —

look at the grass—Thyrza!" She lifted her head and studied him. The clear, awakened tone had something new in it. "The minute I'm dead, you go to Laura. See the man, if he wants you to. Tell him to live in peace. Let him die in peace. Just now we want it. We want peace."

"Yes, yes, I promise."

"Don't stay for vigils in the chamber and foolish funeral sermons. That would worry me. I don't want you to think of me as a dead man. I shall be alive. Ask uncle Terry! Yes, you go to Laura. Ah, I'm easier!" The potion had begun to work. "Put your head down here, darlingest. Say your prepositions. Then you say a verb, you blessed old conjugating duck!"

Thyrza put down her face, as he had told her, and began to say her lessons to him, and after a time the two men came in and stood there quietly, and she was aware of Michael and Katie in the hall without. Presently somebody touched her on the arm, and she knew it was time to go.

Downstairs later she inquired of Katie if there was an early train, and when Katie asked if she must take it, Thyrza answered, like a child,—

"He told me to."

XII

THE SISTERS

I

It was the middle of the forenoon that Thyrza was at Leafy Road, and clouds, disclaiming the prophecy of the day before, had parted to let the sun through gloriously. She got out at the end of the train, and, because there might be one or two who would know her, took the little street that runs, though deviously, into the high road; at one remembered point she stepped over the stone wall into the crosscut and went hurriedly toward home. This was the way running past the Poor Farm, where aunt Ellie had elected to stay, and where Laura had paid her scanty board until she died. It was Thyrza's own road, the one that had led her to all the homely happenings of her youth. It had an autumn brownness now. The dust was on the selfheal and stone-clover, hardhack was out of bloom, and elder-bushes had lost their dripping, winy globes. If she went on, it would be, she knew, to find other play-houses where hers had stood with Laura's and Rosie May's. This was not only because they three had, in the old days, chosen their sites so cunningly that other children would find them adapted to the purposes of life, but because play-houses are inherited from a previous generation, and

where one has been another is sure to be. It is as the birds return to a beloved branch. To remember this gave Thyrza an aching yet peaceful sense of the permanence of homely things.

For the moment it seemed possible to drop the coil of middle life, and, carrying time by assault, leap back into the world when, on still mornings or windy afternoons and tranquil ones, she was dipping into wells of learning with Barton Gorse. Yet here she smiled, for Barton Gorse had never been so surely leading her as now. Thyrza had never had such a sense of being companioned and supported by intelligences clearer than her own; Angelica in her warm impatience and her impulsive carelessness seemed to be with her, and Barton Gorse, the spirit of him, everywhere, through the illusion of nature. He had lifted, for a moment, the curtain of the shows of life, and now he was to look out at her always through the things that are, and counsel her, with the authority of the removed spirit, to understand their fleetingness.

Her mother's house was closed. The great elm was bare, and the leaves, a drift of crumpled fragments, though some of them, withered into brown scrolls, seemed to hide messages of deepest import, stirred under her feet with a kind of sentience, she felt, a knowledge that she had come. The walls were shutting her out, yet she could see, in their mellow grayness, that they meant kindly to her, and she turned away, her hand at her throat, and on her lips the old, inherited cry, "O my soul!"

Andy had torn down his grandmother's house and built him a towered mansion on the hill behind; but it had not been quite finished when the crash of his fortunes came, and there were bare, hideous lapses in its florid amplitude, places where there were designed to be ornaments only less horrible than the lack of them, but which, being missed, made it merely desolate. It was a treeless plot. Andy had, in the pride of his fortunes, selected a place where he could, as he said, "have a view," but where it was to be hoped that everybody would take from below a counter-view, uninterrupted, of his magnificence.

Thyrza, in her humility, could not go to the double front-door, weatherworn to the grain. She sought out a side entrance, and twisted the button that was the bell, grinding out sound without resonance. Laura herself was going through the entry it gave upon, and she opened the door. It was strange that, although she was large and fair and handsome, with a smooth outline that left care and trouble no vantage-ground in her face, she should seem to Thyrza not only herself but their mother as well. She was in no sense like Mrs. Tennant, but she breathed to Thyrza such familiarity and kinship that surely it must be motherhood that spoke in them both, — through her also to Laura, she had time to hope. Laura, who was a woman of no outspoken passion, gazed at her an instant, taking in the surprise of her, the unexpectedness of her rich attire, and then uttered her name, and clung to her as if Thyrza, slighter than she, were a refuge of all kinds.

"You said you would n't come," she kept saying. "You said you would n't."

"I said I could n't," Thyrza answered gently, her mind now on mercy. What Barton Gorse had counseled in brief seemed to run into everything. He was the unseen witness of her deeds, to be so forevermore. "I found I could."

Laura lifted her wet face and smiled at her.

"Let me shut the door," she said. "It 's kind of chilly, these fall days. Come in the kitchen. There ain't any fire anywheres else, an' this old barracks is dreadful cold."

The sound of her voice, still like their mother's, though of a richer quality, was stimulating and soothing, like food and drink. They went on to the kitchen, and Thyrza was moved by the poverty, the unfinished look of everything. It was a meagreness singularly striking beside that of her own house, because hers had been meant to be a little poor refuge and exquisite cleanliness was enough to dress it; but this had striven for luxury and broken down before attaining it. She went back to the hall and hung up her hat and cloak; then, finding Laura had disappeared, she returned to the kitchen, and took an apron from the nail. She tied it on, and Laura found her at the sink washing dishes, and said nothing because the act seemed to them both so natural.

"Where's Andy?" Thyrza began at length, composedly.

Suddenly Andy seemed no longer the enemy of her

peace. She could ask for him as she had asked a hundred times years ago when Laura had knowledge of him through kindred purposes and Thyrza was the one outside.

Laura hesitated a moment. Her mother's frown sprang between her brows. Once there had been delicate indication of it. Now it had come to stay.

"Well," she said, "I don't hardly know what to make of it." This, Thyrza could see, was the perplexity of one to whom every new issue must, through the habit of misfortune, become a doubtful one. "Andy's give up his speculatin' an' all — high time, too! even a rat won't gnaw an empty cob — an' he's took to carpenterin'."

"Well," said Thyrza, "he was always possessed to get a two-foot rule into his hands."

"So he was. Sometimes seems if he's took a long turn amongst them mines an' things, an' gone back to what he was cut out for. Mebbe we all travel a kind of a roundabout way an' then come back in the end."

Abstractions were alien to Laura. Even this homely shred of philosophy must have been so painstakingly nourished that Thyrza wondered what its roots might be.

But Laura was returning to the obvious.

"Well, that's how 't is," she concluded. Then she cast Thyrza a quick yet doubtful glance. "I don't know how you 'll take it," she said. "I heard Barton Gorse was comin' home. It was in the paper when he sailed. He 'd ought to be here by now."

"Oh, yes," said Thyrza. She was smiling as if there were something in the news to make her happy. "He came. I saw him."

Again Laura threw her a sharp look, one that lingered curiously upon her.

"How'd you see him?" she asked. She felt, if it had been by chance, that it might be matter of a doubtful import; but if he had hastened at once to find Thyrza, then something might arise that was fortunate and just.

But Thyrza was beginning to tell the story of his coming, of his accident and of her going to him. And she ended, —

"He died last night. No, this morning, it must have been. The light was coming." It seemed long ago. The time by clocks and watches had not returned to its significance.

Laura was looking at her in a wondering sympathy.

"You hurried away an' posted right down here," she said. "What made you do that?"

"I realized," said Thyrza. Then she stopped and ended soberly, "I realized things are too uncertain."

"Well," said Laura. "Well." She hesitated a moment. "I don't know hardly what to say, now you're in grief."

Thyrza's mind flew swiftly back on the path it had traversed. Was this grief? It seemed rather like acquiescence in his calm. If her own forehead ached under the crown blended of pain and love, she must hold her head proudly, not forgetting it was a crown.

At last she had been loved. She had been bidden to the high destiny of believing she should be loved again.

They worked together in silence for a moment. Laura essayed doubtfully, —

"Did you set by him till the last?" The homely phrase bore in her tone all the meaning of a passionate devotion.

"Oh, yes," said Thyrza, out of the quietude of her state. "There was nobody like him. He set by me, too. We were going to be married."

Laura drew a quick little breath.

"No," said Thyrza. "You need n't be sorry. You must n't think anything of him but what 's the best. He was the best."

"It 's a terrible world." This Laura felt she could venture. "Things come too late."

It seemed to Thyrza, in this spring of her hope, that nothing was too late. Everything was in its place, exactly where it must have been to lead to other things supremely good. Her nature, that had strained forward and leaped at the beautiful, and that she had herself kept so long in a narrow bound, had been released again, not to the pliancy of youth but a greater swing and curve toward the divine certainties we know as hope. Barton, at the threshold of the door he had been opening, to go into other regions, had released her.

"Seems to me," she added, in Laura's own language, "I'm going to be happier than ever I was."

Laura could not understand.

"I suppose Petrie's doin' well?" she threw in, as perhaps a valid cause of contentment, one that could be fathomed.

"Yes. He's in the Philippines."

"Will you think of that! It's wonderful he went through college as he did."

Thyrza was about to say, with some pride, that she and Petrie together did think they had done something rather noteworthy there, but she stayed herself. One part of her mind, like a sharp and kindly monitor, was teaching her how to shield Barton Gorse's memory, as she had shielded Laura from other things. Laura would think ill of him for letting the mother and child fight out their cause alone. What did these things matter, save as they were kindly or unkind? In a little time all men and all women would be at the end of the way and the door would open.

Laura was looking abstractedly past her. She wore the frown of deepest thought. Now she rose and took her little shawl from its nail. This had been their mother's shawl. Thyrza knew it, — the torn place in the fringe where Barton's puppy of old memory had chewed it, the spot where in a washing the plaids had inexplicably run, — and her heart was sick at the call of vanished time.

"I'm goin' over to Peltons'," said Laura, with determination now, "an' tell Andy you're here. He was thinkin' some of stayin' over there to dinner, to

get along with the work; but when he hears you 've come, I guess he'll put for home."

Thyrza called after her. "Tell him I shan't stay. Tell him it's only for a little while."

Shortly, it seemed, after Thyrza had sat looking in a muse at the homely furnishings about her, here and there poignantly familiar, as they had been supplemented from her mother's store, Laura was back again. She sank at once into a chair. It seemed that she could meet her perplexity better so.

"I don't know hardly how to put it," she began. "He says he can't come home."

"Well," returned Thyrza gently, "that's all right. Why, you crying, Laura? My lamb, you must n't cry."

The habit of tender words woven once shamefacedly for Petrie only, seemed now not bright and strong enough for daily use.

Laura was wiping her tears abstractedly on the little shawl.

"Why," said she, "seems if he did n t feel to come. I told him we'd got company, an' he left off hammerin' an' turned round, budge as you please; an' then I told him 't was you an' he better make half a day, so's to come home, an' he put in hammerin' for all he's worth, an' says he, 'You tell her I'm sorry, but I can't. I can't. I can't.' I could n't hardly tell what he meant, he hammered so, but seemed as if he kep' on sayin' it — 'I can't. I can't. I can't.' What's got into him, Thyrza? Andy an' you always used to be good friends."

Thyrza lifted a cover from a too impetuous kettle. She gave herself a moment for considering.

"We're good friends now," she said. "You tell him he need n't be sorry any more."

Hatreds and revenges looked to her like the grains of sand the sea engulfs so deep that they never rise again until the waves pile them, with a million others, to build a rampart. She was not to eat Andy's salt? She smiled over the puerile conceit when she sat later at the kitchen table, breaking bread with Laura. She could not kiss her sister whose peace she had so terribly invaded. Yet an hour after, when they clung to each other and parted, Thyrza looked her in the eyes with eyes as honest as her own and gave her lips unhesitatingly. This was because Barton Gorse, who was dead, had shown her the better way.

"I told him how well Petrie's gettin' on," Laura said, at parting. "I thought maybe, if he was thinkin' of that, he 'd feel different if he knew the boy had made somethin' of himself. 'God!' he says to himself, like that. 'T was as if he thought how we never 'd had any children an' there was n't a soul to bear his name. 'God!' he says. Andy never 's been a swearin' man."

That night Thyrza was home again, spent with hurry but knowing at last the taste of happiness. Barton Gorse was lying in his own house waiting for burial, and her heart was with him though not urging her feet to take her there. She did not even keep vigil for him, but lay down in her bed, hoping for

sleep because she needed it, and folding her hands like that other traveler who had found the deepest rest of all. Her hat and cloak she laid aside with a feeling that she should never wear them any more. They had belonged to a great occasion. They seemed like wedding garments spun and made for her meeting with Barton Gorse, to give him momentary earthly pride in her. She thought it probable that she should go back to her plain clothes and the elderly bonnet with strings.

II

When Thyrza came into the inheritance of her house, she went there alone after the last day's packing and saying good-by to the little dwelling where she had lived so long. That seemed to her not so much the surrender of a part of her own life as that of Petrie whom she had made over to Angelica. It was all Petrie. She had taken the place to bring him up in, she had worked for him there when it would have been easier to lie down and die, if she had wrought for herself alone; and the chapter was finished. Petrie was a part of her gone out into the world, and the nest that had held him seemed a hollow thing. She said good-by to her few acquaintances, and to the river, which had been a beauty and a lonesomeness more intimate in its response to her than any human soul but one. Then she went to her own house in Longford, which seemed to her still, because he had given it to her, the house of Barton Gorse.

It was a cold, windless evening when she walked up the drive. The mountain ash by the door was bare and the path had been swept; she was glad, because there would be no red berries under her feet. A light was in the front hall and another in the kitchen. The place looked ample and dark, but it was kind. She stood in front of it a long time, cold as she was, and looked up at its magnificence. "Are you my house?" she asked it, in a voiceless way, and it seemed to answer, kindly and hopefully, that it was. Then she rang the bell and Katie came, and called upon the saints to govern her surprise.

"You 'd a right to let me know you were coming," she said more than once, while she drew Thyrza back into the warm kitchen where she had been sitting, half asleep. Michael had gone out to have a smoke and a gossip with a crony. Thyrza explained that she was neither too cold nor hungry, but that somehow she had wanted to come exactly like this, alone and after dark. Katie got her food and drink; then they sat and talked about Barton Gorse. Thyrza was avid for accounts of him, as he was in boyhood, in his young manhood, though she had seen him then; later, she knew, she could study his mother's picture hanging there in the great hall, and vaguely recalling that other day when she had been here and seen it like a figure through a mist. It was evident that Barton had talked about her to his old retainer. Katie owned as much. That night when he had made his will, he had told her things. Thyrza could see that she was a precious

charge. Then Katie left her by the fire and went to prepare a room for her, and Thyrza presently got a candle and went wandering about the lower part of the house. Katie, coming down for more wood, found her just as she stood in the great west parlor, an awed look on her face.

"Why," said Thyrza, turning in the simplicity of her wonder, "here 's a piano."

Katie nodded.

"It 's tuned," she said. "He told me that the night he died."

"Told you it was tuned?"

"Told me to have it done. 'Keep the piano in order,' he says. 'Keep it tuned.'"

Thyrza knew why. It was for her coming. She went up to it timidly, opened the cover and struck a chord. It was not a new piano, but it had been wonderful in its time, and now the reedy thrill of it seemed to summon echoes of long ago. It summoned Barton's mother and with her the little boy that learned to play on those keys, and it wakened, too, the hosts of Thyrza's keen desires when she had been a child and all doors seemed open to her. Now there was only one door open, the one by which Barton had gone, and the way to it looked pleasant and the portal wreathed in flowers.

While she stood there and Katie went pottering off after her wood, Thyrza wondered why she had wanted a piano: whether it was for the prisoned music in it or because it stood for some of the unattained rich-

ness of being while she lived meagrely in her mother's house. She could not tell. She did know that music reft her soul away and carried it to unimagined lands where new desires reigned. It was always desire with her, the surge of life. What would be the desires beyond the flower-wreathed door? But Katie came and scolded her off to bed because the sitting-room was chill, and Thyrza lay in her great four-poster wakefully until the fire flickered down, and felt she had at last come home.

It was the next day, when her trunks had been delivered and her things were in order and the whole house was warmed so that she could begin living, that Angelica's telegram came, sent on from Tretower. Angelica was of the sort to dart at every invention of the mind of man to save trouble to the white hand that had forgotten labor. Thyrza looked at the length of the message and wondered. When she found it came from Paris, she marveled again, because it had never seemed to her that a wire had been laid under the sea for less than the communication of international affairs. But this was the death of no potentate. It was all about Petrie, of whom Angelica wired as simply, though she did not use his name, as she might have talked of him in a silence behind closed doors. She was jubilant. He had written her fully. When his job was over, he would go to her in Paris. They would be married there. They would probably live six months of every year abroad. Thyrza would come to them. But Thyrza thought she should not go to them. She would

stay here, the custodian and lover of Barton Gorse's house, except when Laura wanted her. It might yet be a lingering way to the flowery door, but it would hardly be long enough for her to read books and make herself grand for Barton Gorse when, as he had promised, she should see him again. Thyrza cared less about books than she had, but she would always have an awed worship of what she called the intellectual life.

So three or four days passed in a sweet solitude blooming with little tasks. She and Katie became the kindest friends, and Thyrza at once seemed to come into the inheritance of loving her house. She had that intimate sense of its possession that springs usually only with inheritance or after long usage, and she began to have visions of what it would be when Angelica and Petrie invaded it. That would never be for long at a time, because they were birds of passage in this keen modern air that tired her but only helped their wings, and it was better for Petrie to grow up with Angelica to love and scold him. Thyrza was still a little afraid of Petrie, because she would never get over the certainty of wronging him by bringing him into the world with no inheritance; but if he frowned over Barton Gorse for giving her a house, there would be Angelica to tell him, in her own and Petrie's language, which was not the tongue of Thyrza at all, that he must accept a part of his mother's destiny.

Meantime the minister had called, and Thyrza had said to him quite simply, not to court disguises, that

she had been about to marry Barton Gorse when he died. The minister knew that. The doctor had told him, and it became apparent that here, too, in his one last night of action, Barton Gorse had prepared her way for her. Even while she was talking to this authoritative caller, Thyrza's mind, the part that was always in tension, watching, holding itself ready for the assault, warned her that the day might come when her tall Petrie would walk in and she must say without flinching, "This is my son." But that might never be required of her. She was beginning to believe in the beneficence of things.

It was a day she always remembered as the one with the beautiful sunset, when some one else came. Thyrza thought she had never in her life seen such a flaming west nor such rivers of various color flowing together under the lucent skyey green. She had gone into the porch to look at it when she saw a figure walking toward her as if it came, taking the curving driveway, out of the west itself. At first, it loomed, through some optical illusion, very large, and by its veiled face and cloaked figure, gave Thyrza, with a throb of the heart, a memory of one of the three sisters she had grown used to seeing, sitting in her room ready to walk with her or wait for her, but never to leave her free. It came closer and lessened, as it neared, into the figure of a woman shrouded from the cold, and Thyrza smiled, because it seemed again an omen that the last Fury left had dwindled into something human like herself. The woman walked rapidly, and

seeing Thyrza, threw up her shrouding veil and came the faster.

"Laura! Laura!"

She ran down the steps, and at the foot they met. Laura looked curiously old-fashioned, for the veil she had thrown over her bonnet was an embroidered one that had been, Thyrza knew, their grandmother's at least. It might have been for warmth, but Thyrza thought it looked like mourning. She drew Laura in, with no more words, and put her by the blazing hearth. There Laura seemed older and half-terrified, as if she were unused to taking impulsive steps and realized this was one. She had dragged her bonnet hastily off, and her hair, rumpled beneath, gave her a disordered look. Thyrza thought she was ill with tiredness. They hardly spoke together until her things were put away, and Thyrza had urged the fire to a brighter opulence. Laura, watching her half-abstractedly, and yet as if every motion were to be prized because time had so starved her of sisterly companionship, now when the fire was piled and Thyrza, from a cricket, turned up to her a brightly expectant face, let her hands fall in her lap in what seemed relinquishment. They lay there as if glad to find no use for their practiced skill. She, too, was smiling a little, faintly, but in an eager way as if she saw reasons for beseeching Thyrza to let them both be happy.

"Well," said she, "this is a great undertakin'."

Thyrza hardly dared respond, even by a thought.

Why had Laura come? "What is it, dear?" she managed to ask faintly. "What have you undertaken?"

"Comin' here," said Laura. She was really smiling now. "Packin' me a bag an' takin' the cars an' all. I got so worried."

Had Laura come to ask dreadful questions? If she had, Thyrza knew she must keep warm arms about her sister until they both could understand there was nothing to be feared, even in such clash and coil of circumstance. It seemed possible at last to trust everybody with the biggest secrets, to make the most tremendous challenges. Yet her heart beat miserably, and it was only when Laura spoke again that she could find the breath to answer.

"Well, I thought it out, dear, your comin' to this big house all soul alone, an' seemed as if I'd got to drop in an' see how 't was with you."

"Oh, is that true, Laura? is that true?" Thyrza cried wildly. "Oh, how dear you were!"

Again she hoped the storm had passed her by and somehow, for good, until perhaps she and Laura met within the door Barton Gorse had opened and could smile at all these play-house sorrows.

"But," said Laura, "there 's somethin' else."

Now it had come. Thyrza knew that as well as if the words were on the air.

"Yes," she answered. "Say it, Laura. Say it quick and get it over."

Laura was ready. She had framed her simple question.

"Thyrza, what 's set him ag'inst you so?"

Thyrza made no play at obscurity. She sat now with her gaze on the hearth, thinking, in a desperate concentration. The firelight flushed to crimson the cheek it touched, and she got up finally and moved outside its range. Then she sat down in a chair at the other side of the hearth.

"So," she mused, "Andy 's set against me?"

"Yes. Or, no, maybe it ain't wholly that. Sometimes I 've surmised it ain't that at all. But it 's somethin'. Seems if I could n't bear to have Andy die, maybe, an' not at peace with my own sister. I could n't bear to die myself an' think he was unforgivin'."

"Andy has n't anything to forgive me for," said Thyrza, as simply as she would have reassured a child.

Laura was musing still. Thyrza considered for a moment. Then she went on.

"Andy has n't seen me, Laura, since Petrie was born. I guess he never 's wanted to."

Laura was following out her own stumbling thoughts, doggedly, as if she could see them to their conclusion only as she went unaided.

"Andy 's a good man himself," she brooded, "but he never was one to be hard on folks' failin's, even the worst. What 's made him hard on you?"

"We can't talk about it," cried Thyrza. Her voice rang out and frightened her. By a curious inversion, the sound seemed to indicate a return of her old fears and angers. She admonished it to be gentle. "Laura!"

There was a question she had meant to ask once only, if it were possible. It seemed as if the answer might reassure and strengthen her.

"Well?"

"Have you been happy with Andy?"

Laura looked at her in a perfect clarity.

"Thyrza," said she, "Andy 's rough an' he 's careless, but he 's been a good husband to me — as good as ever stepped."

"I don't mean that. Folks can be good folks, but that don't make us happy with 'em. Have you been contented?"

Laura kept that earnest look. She seemed to be charging herself, in the measure of Thyrza's vehemence, to answer with a nicety of truth.

"I 've been as happy as the day is long. He 's had his black times, Andy has. Once he said he used to feel when he was young he was half-drunk all the time, he was so rugged. 'But,' he says, 'I got sobered quick enough.' I don't know what sobered him. Maybe 't was losin' money an' all, an' havin' things come out the little end o' the horn about the new house. Thyrza," — She was looking into the fire now — "what do you s'pose made Barton Gorse give me that legacy?"

"He wanted to," Thyrza temporized. "He felt kindly towards you, Laura."

"Why, he did n't hardly know me. He had n't begun to give you lessons when I went away with great-aunt Mary."

"He knew how much I set by you. Never mind, if it's going to be some use."

"I guess it is! Everything's mortgaged an' has been nigh onto ten years now. It's a godsend. But there's another queer thing about that — Andy says he'll be whipped if he'll touch a cent of it. He says it's all goin' into the savin's bank in my name."

Katie came in to tell them supper was ready, and Thyrza said to her, —

"You remember my sister, Katie. She's come to make me a visit. We haven't been able to see each other for years, but she'll be here a great deal now."

Katie looked at them kindly.

"Well," said she, "God never shuts one door but he opens another."

Then they went out to supper, and Laura could hardly eat, and certainly could not talk, because of her wonder over the exquisite table, its damask and bright silver. Once or twice she hid her worn hands under the cloth, when she thought Katie might be looking and judging her for not growing up more of a lady; but Thyrza was so calm that presently she, too, could be.

Her room was opposite Thyrza's, with the hall between, and when they were undressed Thyrza went across the way, her hair hanging, and brush in hand. She felt little and young, and she wanted to gossip as they used to, only that was in whispers lest their mother should call to them to go right straight off to sleep. Laura, in her nightgown, her face flushed by

the fire, was younger than the woman in the figured veil.

"Mercy, Thyrza," she said, "you don't mean to tell me you 've kep' up brushin' your hair at night, hard as you 've worked."

"Every night," Thyrza smiled. She had wanted to hold fast to every nicety of habit because she was Petrie's mother.

"Well, I ain't," said Laura. She sat down in the big hooded chair by the fire, and Thyrza wrapped a shawl about her. "I've been so tired, for the last twenty years, I could n't do any more 'n tumble into bed. Thyrza, what made you say that to old Katie?"

"What, Laura?"

"About my bein' here considerable."

"You're going to be," Thyrza cried, with unaffected appeal. "Why, whatever should I do if you were n't? Of course you 'll be here every minute he can spare you."

"You see, I just packed my bag an' took the train, because seemed as if I had to touch you. There was another reason, too. But I never so much as thought you 'd say a thing like that."

"You're all I've got to make a home with."

"You 've got Petrie."

"Petrie 'll be away. He 's one of the roving kind."

"Andy was," Laura said, her mind going inevitably back. "Sometimes I've thought he never was the man to settle down in one spot. Thyrza!" Now the moment had really come. Thyrza quailed before it

with an inherited pang, because the gentle voice had in it a mandatory note lent it by trouble. It seemed a family voice, mother's, perhaps, bidding them come in out of the dew, or great-aunt Mary's even, echoing with some truism to the effect that they must heed and obey. "Thyrza," the voice relentlessly continued, "if you know anything ag'inst Andy that makes him loath to face you, you tell me now."

The fire leaped and fell, to vault again, and the answering shadows looked like uncouth shapes commissioned to a mad authority. They ran over the peaceful room and wrought unmeaning havoc with it. The flowers on the wall-paper moved to show they were alive in some new, unhappy way, and the window-curtains seemed to tremble as if there were hands upon them.

Thyrza, without premeditation, was on her knees at her sister's side, swept by a thousand impulses, commanded by as many voices. The voices chorused at her, but in harmony. Barton Gorse was smilingly, whimsically even, reminding her again that grief was only the root of something bound to blossom gloriously; her mother was telling her in homely speech to "play kind and pretty" with her sister, and Angelica's clear, brilliant note, overtopping the others, bade her remember there were ways of doing things well when you needed to do them at all. That voice of Angelica's, touched with color like little points of light, was urging her to move cleverly, delighting, if she could, in the game, and she, more even than the

others, made it seem as if the devil of tragedy were the adversary and Thyrza must outwit him. Also Thyrza seemed to be on her knees, not to Laura but in the humble house of life Laura had built, kneeling there and with both her hands washing it to make it clean, praying in it that she might help to keep it holy. Now she lifted her head and looked at her sister, laughing a little, unaffectedly. Angelica, she knew, was showing her that device. She chose their childhood's speech, to send her darts the straighter.

"Laura," — now she laughed again, — "don't you know what men-folks are? Once you wear 'em out they take to their heels, and that's the last you see of 'em. When we were little, you and Andy were forever getting up projects together, and I was forever under foot. I guess Andy had enough of me then, so it's lasted till this day. Men-folks don't reason. They just act."

"Well," said Laura, in a trembling clutch at a responsive gayety, "seems if they acted pretty foolish sometimes."

She was leaning back in her chair, shaking all over with long shudders. Thyrza laid a hand on each of her wrists, and holding her so, looked at her fixedly.

"Laura," she said, "there is n't a thing in the world I blame Andy for, not a thing. You remember that. If ever there's any need of it, you tell him so." But as she said it she knew there was no need. The danger had gone by. Her laugh had banished it.

"Maybe I've been a fool," said Laura. The shud-

ders, quieting now, were little more than breaths, half-laughing ones. Now wifely loyalty came flooding back, and she cried jealously, "I was goin' to say if you thought you knew anything, it wa'n't true. I could show you it wa'n't true."

Thyrza came to her feet and sank soberly into a chair. The fire had quieted into a warm-hearted glow, and the room seemed stiller, in some way, the flowers on the walls fixed in a garden of their own, and the window-curtains like watchers keeping out the dark and cold. Laura was reflecting in a relief as different as possible from the mood just dissipated, and Thyrza's face, reddened from the fire and shadowed by its dark hair, seemed to arrest her gaze.

"Why, Thyrza," said she, "you look terrible young."

"You will now you're going to have an easier time," said Thyrza, and then threw in a phrase of their mother's, "when you get 'cruited up."

"I feel as old as the hills," Laura confessed, with a little amused laugh at their plight of coming age. It was the first laugh Thyrza had heard from her, and she loved it. "Seems if 't would be kind o' restful to grow old."

Thyrza considered for a moment.

"I don't know but I should like to grow old, too," she said.

"It come to me the other day, that women give over bein' young when they get through with menfolks. Well, you've got through, Thyrza. It ain't likely you'll take notice again."

"No," said Thyrza. She laughed a little, tenderly. It seemed to her as if there could hardly be minutes enough in the longest day to reassure Laura from her long timidity at life, to entertain and serve her. "Let's play we're mother," she said. "You play it this visit and I will next time."

Laura smiled then.

"You was always one to keep things goin'," she said. "I guess you never'd want to dress the way mother did, come to that. You've got a terrible gay hat an' cloak."

"I shan't wear 'em any more," said Thyrza earnestly, "not unless —"

"Unless what, dear?"

"Unless Petrie and his wife want I should." She flushed with pride when she spoke of Petrie's wife.

Laura smiled again at her, in great fondness.

"I guess you'll wear 'em out," she prophesied. "I'm an old woman, Thyrza. It ain't years that change us; it's what you've been through."

Thyrza could not answer. It seemed to her she had been through enough.

"You was always one to rise on the top o' the wave," said Laura, ruminating. "I should n't be surprised if you had considerable life yet."

Thyrza wondered. She could see herself here with Margaret Petrie, who had just written that she was coming home, with Laura, too, in jealously desired intervals. Others would come. Margaret Petrie would draw them by her divine, fantastic kindness,

and they could rest and go their ways again sure-footedly. Perhaps thousands of pilgrims would come, or even one or two superlatively weary, and Thyrza could be allowed to read to them from the illuminated missal of her hope. But there was another path. That, too, she saw open to her. Petrie and Angelica might summon her, and she guessed how Angelica would adorn her, telling her age had its own beauty. The road would lead her out into the world, and she knew Barton Gorse would wish her to go, and that she should strangely find his footprints there at the shrines art had adorned and prayed before. It would be like lingering through long galleries where every picture told her some story of what he had learned or loved light-heartedly; that might ensure her a more perfect kinship with him when they should meet at last. Yet here she paused, remembering that their harmony in that day would spring from something simpler still—the old, old love of righteousness.

Perhaps Laura, too, would go journeying with her, and gasp over the wonders of the earth so faintly set forth by her school geography. Whatever happened, it was all simple and plain because Barton Gorse had seemed to explain it to her, and at the end there would be the flowery door and Barton Gorse to show her other ways.

She came to herself with a start. Laura was regarding her benevolently.

"I guess you 'most dropped off," she said.

Thyrza braided her hair and tossed it back over her shoulder. She rose to say good-night.

"Laura!"

"What is it?"

"What if you and I should sleep together just to-night same's we used to?"

Laura was looking at her with suffused eyes, all longing and understanding.

"I guess we better," she agreed. "I'm the biggest. I'll put my arm over you."

Thyrza nodded.

"Same as mother used to."

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